PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 150

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1988-89

COMPRISING PERIOD
4 APRIL—14 APRIL 1989

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COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—Mrs. J. Garbutt

POSTMASTER—J. Arnold

TRANSPORT MANAGER—R. H. Hyde

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

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HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Opting Out)

1. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have voted to opt out to date; and if he will make a statement.

3. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his proposed funding of opted-out schools.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Baker): At least 63 schools have begun the legal procedures for seeking grant-maintained status. So far parents have voted at 51 schools. In 38 they have authorised a formal application, and I have already approved four such applications. My proposals for funding grant-maintained schools were set out in a consultation paper on 10 March.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend welcome the confidence shown by the parents of pupils at St. James's Church of England school which has allowed the school to take up a full entry quota for next year? Will he assure the governors of the school that they will receive all the support that th[illegible]d in view of the mean-mindedness of Bolton council which has threatened to withdraw all but the legal minimum of support services, even though the people of Bolton greeted my right hon. Friend's decision to provide grant-aided status with jubilation?

Mr. Baker: I deplore the absurd and rather threatening statement made some time ago by Bolton's chief education officer that teachers in grant-maintained schools do not have the right experience to serve in LEA schools. That is transparent nonsense. With regard to funding, local authorities will retail some legal responsibilities for certain services to pupils in grant-maintained schools, but when governors become responsible for running schools, they will have the money to provide the basic education service and to buy specialist support either from the local education authority or, if the authority is not willing, from other suppliers.

Mr. Greenway: Bearing in mind the excellent opt principle and its fairness, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will under no circumstances allow grant-maintained schools to be in any way disadvantaged in comparison with local authority schools? Will he take note of what the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said—which contrasts with what his party has said—that Church schools and others should opt out of the local education system?

Mr. Baker: I assure my hon. Friend that the rules about parity of funding are clearly set out in the memorandum that I have already issued. Like my hon. Friend, I was very interested to see the report produced by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). In it the hon. Gentleman praised the status of grant-maintained schools and advocated that that option should be taken up by Church schools. That is clearly a very significant contribution to the debate from a distinguished member of the Labour party. I only hope that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) will listen to him.

Mr. Frank Field: Clearly the Secretary of State for Education and Science did not attend a grant-maintained school because if he had, he might have read the pamphlet more ably. In that pamphlet I advocated that opting out

schools should opt in to a federated Church status. If that happens, does the Secretary of State agree that the Education Reform Act 1988 would be radically changed in a way which might be more on keeping with his views, but less in keeping with those of the Prime Minister?

Mr. Baker: No. I think that in his pamphlet the hon. Gentleman urged that Church schools of all denominations should take advantage collectively or individually of grant-maintained status. I am glad that he had the courage to say that. I was a little surprised by the reaction of the Member for Leeds, Central when the pamphlet was published. He said:

"Frank is out of line with party and Church thinking on this."——

but he added, and this must be very reassuring for the hon. Member for Birkenhead——

"We are not going to kick him for having other views."

Mr. George Howarth: Does the Secretary of State agree that 97·4 per cent. of parents at Ruffwood school in my constituency, who voted against opting out, pretty well tumbled what a fatuous and stupid way that would have been to run their school?

Mr. Baker: The whole purpose of a ballot is that parents have a choice; some say no and some say yes, and more are saying yes than no. I am sure the hon. Gentleman will find it reassuring that more schools in Labour authorities—*[Interruption.]* I have the figures. Indeed, of the 63 schools which have so far embarked on the statutory procedures, 24 are in Labour-controlled local education authority areas, 22 in Conservative, 16 in hung areas and one in an SLD-controlled area. That disposes of the rumour that it is only in the Tory areas that schools wish to opt out.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that grant-maintained schools will have an impact out of all proportion to their numbers, because they will do a great deal to improve the quality and standard of state education and will be used as benchmarks against which other schools will be judged?

Mr. Baker: I am quite sure my hon. Friend is right. This is one of the reasons why we introduced this new type of school, and I am sure that they will provide a standard of excellence and will be beacons. This is, after all, the very thinking behind the pamphlet issued by the hon. Member for Birkenhead.

Mr. Straw: I, too, have a list, Mr. Speaker—on this occasion supplied by the GMS trust—which shows that of the 49 schools balloted, as of 4 April, only 20 are in Labour-controlled areas and many more in Conservative-controlled areas. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, 22—two more.

What is the Secretary of State's view of his senior chief inspector's report "Education Standards 1988-89" which shows that plans to reorganise secondary schools appear to have been slowed by uncertainty over the effect of recent legislation, especially that relating to grant-maintained schools? Does the Secretary of State agree with the chief inspector that opting out is paralysing the sensible planning of school provision, wasting money and is undermining education opportunities for a great many young people?

Mr. Baker: It will come as no surprise to the House that my figures are more up-to-date and correct than the hon. Gentleman's. I do not believe that reorganisation plans are being paralysed. It is interesting that some of the schools which decided to vote no are themselves subject to major reorganisation, amounting virtually to closure, and that they have voted in favour of that rather than go for grant-maintained status, which indicates that the essence of this and what the Labour party does not like about it is that grant-maintained status is all about parental choice, and that is what we are seeing.

Schools (Financial Management)

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the average cost method of allocating resources to schools under the local financial management provisions of the Education Reform Act.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): My right hon. Friend has received some correspondence from authorities and schools expressing concern about the requirement for schemes of local management to provide for average costs, including average salary costs, to be reflected in the formula for distributing resources between schools. Circular 7/88 allows LEAs to devise formulae which safeguard the position of small schools which might otherwise find it difficult to accommodate actual salary costs. I understand that the majority of authorities are satisfied that this flexibility provides a certain measure of protection.

Mr. Coombs: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that in the consultation processes in schools there is a tremendous and almost universal acceptance of the opportunities put forward by local financial management? Will she also agree, however, that there is some concern at the interaction between the provisions of the school pay and conditions document and the average cost per capita methods of funding different schools, which may in some cases lead to differences of £40,000 between similar schools? Will she therefore consider giving the opportunity of flexibility to certain LEAs in order to be able to vire funds between those schools to avoid those kinds of anomalies?

Mrs. Rumbold: It is true that during the consultative period a large number of authorities agreed that local management of schools will be beneficial. Also, it is misleading at the present time to look simply at one of the cost elements in isolation when considering some of the formulas. It is essential for all authorities to consider the combined effect of all the elements in the formula and not simply the salary costs. On the final question, I do not want to anticipate the statutory approval process but, of course, it may well be possible that there would be some flexibility in individual, exceptional cases, where there are particular difficulties.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Has my hon. Friend noted that a number of Kent schools have been running under local financial management for some time, two of them in Gravesham? Has she further noted that that is immensely popular with the local schools since it allows them to obtain greater value for the money provided and the ability to make cash purchases which has resulted in the quick delivery of books, and at a discount?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am delighted to hear of those experiences in Gravesham in my hon. Friend's constituency. During a recent visit to another authority a head teacher told me, of his own volition, that he had been very much against the idea of local management schemes, but after three years of operating he was entirely in favour of it because he had found so much to his benefit that he had not expected.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister says that local education authorities are happy that they should determine the formula. Are small schools happy with that?

Mrs. Rumbold: As the hon. Gentleman will know, there is special provision for small schools with fewer than 10 teachers to have their provisions determined by the local education authority within the formula weighted in their favour. Therefore, there is provision within the formula for small schools.

4. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he plans to issue further advice to education authorities on the criteria to be used in dividing existing education budgets among the schools under their control for the purposes of local financial management.

Mrs. Rumbold: Circular 7/88 sets out the framework for local education authority schemes of local management. My right hon. Friend has no plans to issue further guidance. Officials of the Department's LMS unit are in touch with individual local education authorities and are happy to advise on any particular points of concern which may arise during the preparation of a scheme.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Will she encourage local education authorities as much as possible to use all the flexibility that is available within the current guidelines and, where necessary, advise local authorities on an individual basis of the amount of flexibility that it is available to avoid unnecessary and unacceptable results in the funding of individual schools?

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes. I can reassure my hon. Friend that local authorities have the necessary flexibility to construct a formula for special circumstances—for example to weight resources in favour of individual schools in inner cities, those which serve disadvantaged areas, those which admit a higher than average proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities or those with special educational needs.

Mr. Spearing: Can the Minister confirm that local financial management includes responsibility for the repair and maintenance of buildings? If that is so, is that not rather arbitrary? Could it not put an unfair burden on some schools? What guarantee can the Minister give that her Department will provide local authorities with sufficient funds to ensure that schools are treated equitably in that matter?

Mrs. Rumbold: The local financial management schemes will include some money within the formula for general repairs and maintenance. Where such work can be shown to be capital expenditure, it will fall outside delegation within a local financial management scheme and it will be the local authority's responsibility to allocate resources.

Universities (Salaries)

5. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on academic salaries in universities.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): My right hon. Friend has received representations from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Association of University Teachers seeking additional funds for pay increases for university staff. He has also had many letters about salary levels in universities and in criticism of the boycott of examination work by lecturers.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that those academics who are refusing, or threatening to refuse, to mark examination papers are behaving in an unacademic, immoral way which is tantamount to blackmail? Does he also agree that some of them may well be in breach of their contractual obligations to their university, and will he advise pusillanimous principals to take the necessary disciplinary measures against them?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is right. The money offered represents a fair increase in academic pay. The Government have put in extra money and there is no more to come. I hope that all parts of the House join us in condemning any prospect of the rejection of that offer, because that would put students at risk and damage the professional reputation of British university academics.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the Minister recognise that university teachers have a justifiable complaint, given that they received a 0·5 per cent. increase last year and have just been offered 6 per cent. for this year? In view of the great Budget surplus of which the Government are so proud, and given that we cannot allow students to suffer, with the prospect of no examinations in the summer, will the Secretary of State and his Ministers take the initiative by pouring oil on troubled waters and offer to talk about more money in return for the lecturers offering to suspend their action and allow this summer's examinations to take place?

Mr. Jackson: The House should appreciate the context and the sequence of events. On 1 December 1986 there was an increase of 16·6 per cent., and on 1 March 1988, an increase of 7·4 per cent. That meant a 24 per cent. increase in dons' pay between 1985 and 1988, at a time when the retail price index rose by only 13 per cent. There is now an offer from 1 March 1989 of the equivalent of 6·5 per cent., with a further 1 per cent. due for discretionary payments from October. That is a very reasonable and generous offer that has involved additional Government resources, and it should be accepted.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: My hon. Friend will acknowledge that Nottingham university is not exactly a hotbed of militant unrest. Nevertheless, whatever may be the rights and wrongs of this particular case, and regardless of whose figures are right, does my hon. Friend acknowledge that, particularly in science and managerial disciplines, we cannot offer the salaries that will ensure the standards that we believe are necessary in higher education in the long term?

Mr. Jackson: Some evidence was provided—it must be said, rather scanty evidence—of recruitment and retention

difficulties in some areas in the universities. That was one of the reasons that led the Government to advance proposals for extra money. The key to solving the problem lies in increased differentiation in university pay. That element has been included in the offer we have made.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Does the Minister acknowledge that his letter published in *The Independent* last Thursday and his advocacy of university teachers moonlighting to make up what he conceded to be a 25 per cent. cut in their relative pay is singularly ill-judged and insulting, and provides incendiary support for the cause of rejecting the ballot offer? Is moonlighting now the policy of the Government throughout public sector higher education, and is it the policy also of the Secretary of State?

Mr. Jackson: I was attempting to meet the argument that there has been a 25 per cent. cut in dons' pay relative to average earnings. I made the rather elementary point, which I hope the hon. Gentleman understands, that pay is not the same as earnings, and that there is reason to believe that the earnings of academics have increased in the same way as the earnings of other people. It is appropriate for the Government to encourage dons to write books and articles, undertake consultancies, and to assume directorships—all of which involve extra earnings.

Assessment Tests

6. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards implementing assessment tests for school pupils at seven, 11 and 14 years of age.

Mrs. Rumbold: The first step towards implementing the Education Reform Act 1988 is to establish programmes of study——

Mr. Skinner: Mr. Speaker, have you read *The Observer*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That matter has nothing to do with Education Questions.

Mrs. Rumbold: The first step towards implementing the Education Reform Act 1988 is to establish programmes of study for each of the core and foundation subjects. That process is well under way and programmes of study will be introduced for mathematics and science for seven and 11-year-olds this autumn. Children will be assessed in these subjects on a trial basis in 1991, and from 1992 on a reported basis. Assessment arrangements in other subjects and for those and other key ages will be phased in over succeeding years.

Mr. Bennett: In view of the fact that teachers have always tested children, does my hon. Friend share my astonishment, and that of parents, that some teachers and some teachers' unions oppose those tests? Does she agree that assessment tests will provide a national standard benchmark by which schools and teachers can be judged, which will also help parents to judge the progress of their children and how they can best be helped?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The importance of introducing assessment together with the national curriculum is that it will enable teachers, parents and children to monitor the children's programmes of study within the national curriculum. It is absolutely essential that assessment is introduced. I am surprised to learn that some teachers do not agree with this particular policy since I understand that for many years it has been the practice of the majority of teachers to assess the children in their classes on a monthly basis.

Mr. Grocott: Given the Minister's enthusiasm for this endless formalised testing, despite all evidence to the contrary, will she tell us at what point she will have an assessment of the effectiveness of these tests? Will she give a commitment that if they are discovered to be valueless she will scrap the system?

Mrs. Rumbold: I think it very unlikely that assessment will prove valueless since it is a part of the process of teaching which has been going on in schools throughout the country, as we have been assured endlessly by teachers. So the assessment process that we are introducing, following the introduction of the programmes of study with the national curriculum, will be useful not only to the teachers but to the parents. It seems very unlikely that there will be any occasion for parents to wish that assessment be discontinued.

Mr. Favell: At the moment it is virtually impossible to dismiss an incompetent teacher. What is to be done about teachers whose pupils consistently fail their assessment tests?

Mrs. Rumbold: It is hoped very much that we shall ask for teachers themselves to go through a form of assessment. The introduction of teacher appraisal will help those who have difficulty to reassess themselves and to undertake in-service training to improve their performance with pupils. It is crucial that our children are given the best possible teaching and that the teachers themselves produce the results, through assessment and testing, to which pupils and parents are entitled.

Ms. Armstong: Will the Minister take the opportunity to tell the House if age-related testing is to be used as part of the process of ensuring that all children reach their full potential or if, as many now fear, it is to be used as a totally inadequate way of pitting school against school and child against child? Will she further make it clear that crude test scores will not be published for seven-year-old children because such scores would be both misleading and potentially damaging to children's progress?

Mrs. Rumbold: I find it very sad that the hon. Lady should repeat that kind of misinformation to the general public. The whole purpose of testing and assessment of children is to ensure that all children, throughout their school years, can achieve their potential. This is what the whole of the national curriculum is designed to do. We are putting the programmes of study first and the assessment of those programmes afterwards to discover what children have in the way of understanding and knowledge.

Primary Schools (Staffordshire)

7. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil for primary schools in Staffordshire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79, at constant prices.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. John Butcher): In cash terms,

Staffordshire spent £370 per primary pupil in 1978-79 and £980 per primary pupil in 1987-88. At 1987-88 prices those figures are £755 and £980 respectively.

Mr. Knox: Does my hon. Friend agree that these figures show an impressive increase in expenditure per pupil in primary schools in Staffordshire since the present Government came to power? Will he further agree that they provide no evidence at all of alleged cuts in education and staffing by the Government?

Mr. Butcher: I fail to understand how the word "cut" can be used accurately in relation to education budgets. Nationally there has been a 35 per cent. increase in real terms in expenditure per pupil and a not too dissimilar increase in Staffordshire. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: those of us who wish to see improvements in standards of education have put our money where our mouths are and have adequately funded that improvement.

Primary School Teachers

8. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of primary school teachers' working time has been assigned as non-contact time in each of the last five years.

Mr. Butcher: The 1987 primary school staffing survey showed that there were 22·5 hours of taught lessons in the average pupil's week in maintained primary schools in England. Within that total, teachers had an average of two hours' non-contact time.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister will be aware that the same unpublished staffing survey, which is lodged in the House of Commons Library, makes it clear that fewer than half of all primary school teachers have any non-contact time. In my own area, virtually no teachers have non-contact time. A typical school in Cornwall has been described as three teachers and three classes. What will the Minister do to ensure that resources are provided to give teachers the necessary preparation time, particularly in view of the demands placed on them in the drawing up of preparations for the national curriculum?

Mr. Butcher: Non-contact time within the pupil week is not the whole story. Considerably more non-teaching time is available within the 1,265 hours a year that teachers are required to work, and that can be used to prepare for the national curriculum. Of the 195 days a year on which a teacher is required to work, five may be used for in-service training, and schools may close for two days this year specifically to prepare for the introduction of the curriculum.

I know that many representations are being made on the need for further in-service training, but any dispassionate examination of the figures will show that the teaching profession in this country is very well provided for in training.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend examine marking periods in the school week, as distinct from non-contact time as set out in the Education Reform Act? Will he do all that he can to ensure that periods are set aside for marking?

Mr. Butcher: As I said earlier, considerable discretionary allocation of time is available to headmasters. Some 800 of the 1,265 hours are direct teaching time. I should have thought that the activity to which my hon. Friend refers could be catered for within a well-managed school, provided that headteachers were prepared to use their management discretion appropriately. That, indeed, was one of the conclusions reached in the recent Her Majesty's inspectorate report.

Mr. Flannery: The shortage of teachers is now so serious that the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts is examining it very carefully. Has not that shortage, which the Government have created by attacking teachers relentlessly—an attack led from the top on the Front Bench—resulted in the virtual disappearance of non-class-contact time in primary schools? Not only that, but teachers in the primary sector are now staying behind regularly, for an hour or two every day, because of the pressures imposed upon them. When will the Government realise that to bring back teachers who have left the profession they must increase wages and give teachers back their negotiating rights?

Mr. Butcher: The position described by the hon. Gentleman is simply not reflected in the facts. Primary class contact rates have fallen from 91 per cent. in 1984 to 89 per cent. in 1988. That means that, on average, teachers are spending less time in front of classes.

The question of teacher shortages is complex. We understand that there are geographical and, indeed, subject difficulties, and I hope that some of the action plans introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be supported by the hon. Gentleman, as they are proving effective.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

9. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the change in the ratio of pupil-teacher numbers over the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Butcher: The overall pupil-teacher ratio in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools has improved from 17·9 in January 1984 to 17 in January 1988. There are now more teachers relative to pupils than ever before.

Mr. Patnick: I thank my hon. Friend for his answer. Would he care to comment on the initial teacher training recruitment, which is vital if the trend established under the present Government is to continue?

Mr. Butcher: Yes, I should like to report to the House on initial teacher training, but before I do so let me give the House some new information. We have received a massive response to our recent advertising campaign, and more than 8,000 people have expressed an interest in teaching as a career. Surely that gives the lie to the assertion that those who wish to enter the teaching profession are being deterred by alleged demoralisation in the profession.

Recruitment to ITT reached a record in 1988; it was up by 5 per cent. on recruitment in 1987. Primary recruitment was up by 12 per cent. Secondary recruitment was down, but by only 250 students; the underlying trend is still upward.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Of the 8,000 people to whom the Minister referred, how many were interested in

teaching science, maths, combined technology and similar subjects? Does he have evidence to show that the Government's recruitment drive is solving the shortage of teachers in those subjects?

Mr. Butcher: I do not have a breakdown of subjects of interest referenced by those 8,000 responses. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the figures from the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers he will find that there was a higher placement of teachers of maths and science than was the case for teaching in the generality. The fact is that many people are looking for a job in the profession. There are geographical difficulties and differences in standards of living in different regions, and we are aware of them, but I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would care to talk to his ex-colleagues in the teachers' unions about, for example, regional pay.

Teacher Recruitment

11. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to provide additional resources for teacher recruitment.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department's action programme includes bursaries, in-service training, the teaching as a career unit and new publicity, which has amounted to over £51 million in the last three years. That programme will continue and will be extended.

Mr. Wallace: Is the Secretary of State willing to accept that there are still acute shortages in subjects such as maths and physics and that in the last two years his bursary scheme has reached target only once in one subject? Does that not represent a failure? Is it not a fact that far more resources are required if people are to be brought into teaching, not least in subjects such as maths and physics, in which there exist important and serious shortages?

Mr. Baker: Last year saw record figures for the intake of trainees into initial teacher training. The number of applications for the autumn of this year show an increase of 10 per cent. over the number last year. I accept, however, that there are difficulties in the subjects to which the hon. Gentleman referred—in maths, physics, technology and chemistry—and that is why I have extended the bursary scheme to chemistry trainee teachers.

Mr. Baldry: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the deciding factor in whether a sufficient number of people come forward is the way in which the profession portrays itself? To that end, does he agree that every teacher should take cognisance of the advice given by June Fisher, president of the National Union of Teachers, that teachers should stop whingeing and moaning and should take a pride in making a success of the Government's education reforms?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend is right. Far too many people at the teacher conferences last week were talking down their profession. We want to extend the opportunities for qualified people to become teachers. That is why we are putting forward our proposal for licensed teachers, a proposal which is being widely welcomed by many Labour local education authorities. It is absolutely absurd to believe that people who are qualified—who have had two years in higher education and experience in business—should not come into the teaching profession.

Mr. Fatchett: When will the Secretary of State recognise that we are now faced with acute teacher shortages in our schools? When will he also recognise that morale is at an all-time low in the teaching profession? How does he think he will be able to attract more people into the profession when this year he has imposed a cut in real living standards on teachers? When will he stop kicking teachers around?

Mr. Baker: In the recently completed advertising campaign we received over 8,000 applications from people seeking to be teachers. The numbers going to initial teacher training later this year are up by nearly 10 per cent. compared with last year. As for attracting people into the profession, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome our proposal for licensed teachers, because many Labour education authorities are welcoming them.

City Technology Colleges

12. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many parents have written to him objecting to the establishment of a city technology college.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Our records show that only 15 letters of objection have been received in nearly two and a half years to city technology colleges. Parents see the CTC programme as a great opportunity for their children. There have been over 1,200 applications for 180 places available this year at Kingshurst, the first CTC. That is what parents think of CTCs.

Mr. Squire: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that excellent answer give the lie to the comments that we sometimes hear from Labour Members to the effect that parents and children do not want CTCs? Will my right hon. Friend particularly confirm that the interest is as high, if not higher, in areas where poorer standards of education and an absence of choice have been a legacy from the Labour party?

Mr. Baker: We are receiving applications from many areas to have CTCs—either new colleges or schools converted to CTCs. This is proving to be a very popular policy, because people recognise that these schools provide a special type of education. We want them to become beacons of excellence, copied by others. Of course, that is now happening in the Birmingham area.

Mr. Madden: If the Secretary of State is so confident that parents want CTCs, why is he so terrified to allow parents in Bradford a ballot to decide whether £8 million of their money should be spent on setting up a CTC, at a time when the vast majority of them see the expenditure of that amount of money as being wholly unnecessary, very divisive, and damaging to the existing schools in the city?

Mr. Baker: That is simply not true. It has been possible to establish a CTC in Bradford—a new one, to be built next year—only because the Conservatives now control Bradford city council. The hon. Gentleman will find that, once that school is established and has started to recruit,

it will be one of the most popular in Bradford, to which the children of many of his constituents will want to go. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen to Education Questions.

Mr. Holt: My right hon. Friend will know that the new Macmillan CTC in Teesside has been oversubscribed by teachers many times over, and that many of the parents of the 40 to 60 children who applied to join but have not been found places this year will want a new college in addition to the one that we already have.

Mr. Baker: Once again, I am quite sure that that school will be very popular. Many teachers want to teach in it, and many parents want to send their children to it. I am quite sure that after it has been established for a few years its popularity will grow even further.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State must be aware that the parents of children at the Sylvan school in Croydon, which is the subject of a proposal to turn it into a CTC, have voted overwhelmingly to keep it as a county school. Why is the Secretary of State refusing to accept the outcome of that parents' ballot?

Mr. Baker: I understand that the Croydon local education authority voted only last night to publish statutory notices to close the school. That triggers a formal process, and the application will come to me. Of course, I will take into account any objections to the proposal.

School Closures

13. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science to what extent he takes into account parental wishes when considering a school closure.

Mr. Butcher: In considering statutory proposals for school reorganisations, my right hon. Friend takes full account of all representations made by parents, both for and against the proposals.

Mr. Rooker: If the majority of people who have children at Sylvan high school in Croydon are so determined that the school should not be closed, as they have constantly made clear to all four Members of Parliament for Croydon, including you, Mr. Speaker, will the Government accept the wishes of the parents?

Mr. Butcher: The section 12 proposal has now been issued, and we will look at it—as we look at all section 12 proposals—on its merits, separate from the consideration of the CTC.

Mr. Latham: When my hon. Friend comes to consider the section 12 notice to close Long Field high school in my constituency, which is full and, indeed, is extremely popular, will he confirm that he will consider at the same time the 96·4 per cent. parents' vote to go for grant-maintained status?

Mr. Butcher: Of course, we look at the merits of a particular school proposed for closure. Indeed, I take very seriously representations from parents who are concerned to maintain the quality of an existing, well-managed school with a good ethos. Matters of that sort will be taken into account.

City Technology Colleges

14. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures are being taken to find sponsors for city technology colleges.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: We have worked hard to bring the CTC programme to the attention of industry and commerce, and there has been a magnificent response to its aims of raising standards, increasing choice, and giving the private sector a say in how schools are run. Thirty-four million pounds—and unprecedented sum—has already been pledged, and much more will follow.

Mr. Hughes: Given that there is some reported indifference among big business to sponsorship of CTCs, what does the Secretary of State consider will be the effect of Tory-controlled Bexley deciding not to go ahead with one, and of the parents in Tory-controlled Croydon voting by 480 to 14 not to go ahead with a CTC? If parents say not to CTC, will the money from the sponsor be made available to the school, via the local education authority?

Mr. Baker: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would make his views on CTCs known, because in the past he has attacked them. However, I gather that, as a member of the governing body of Bacon's school, he has voted for the proposals for that school to become a CTC to go out to consultation. He really should get off the fence.

Council for Industry and Higher Education

15. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of the Council for Industry and Higher Education; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of the Council for Industry and Higher Education periodically, both formally and informally.

Mr. Taylor: Will my hon. Friend note the welcome that we give to the council and its work and our acknowledgement of the importance of links between education and industry? Will he encourage the idea of regional councils and will he note in particular that the university of Surrey is doing splendid work with local industry and is pioneering further development?

Mr. Jackson: One of the most encouraging features of the higher education scene is the growth of contact between the world of academe in the universities and the polytechnics and industry. The Council for Industry and Higher Education is one of the most notable manifestations of that. We very much welcome it and all proposals for its further development.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Ms. Mowlam: As it is the Government's view that doctors who oppose the Health Service plans are simply feeling for their wallets, what motive does the Prime Minister use to explain the nurses' opposition?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the nurses who have taken part in the five-hospital experiment for the financial initiative will give evidence that it has worked extremely well and has given far more responsibility to both doctors and nurses. Many other reforms in the Health Service have been fought most bitterly by the medical profession. The initial introduction of the National Health Service in 1948 was fought most bitterly by the medical profession, but it was welcomed later.

Q2. **Mr. Curry:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Curry: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her successful visit to southern Africa, particularly her decision to visit Namibia to support the United Nations plan to bring that territory to independence. Will she therefore condemn the incursion from Angola by SWAPO guerrillas into that territory, which is putting at jeopardy the whole of the painfully acquired process?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The secretary general's report to the United Nations and the Security Council specifically confirms that there has been a large-scale incursion from Angola into Namibia by armed SWAPO personnel. It is a most serious challenge to the authority of the United Nations and the internationally agreed arrangements for Namibia's independence, and I certainly condemn it. There is no provision in the United Nations plan for SWAPO to have bases in Namibia. SWAPO committed itself to the Geneva accord under which it is required to stay north of the 16th parallel in Angola. It is the breach by SWAPO which has led to the most regrettable fighting and loss of life. I emphasise that the South African units involved are acting with the authority of the United Nations. It is now important that the authority of the United Nations—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are very important matters.

The Prime Minister: It is important that the authority of the United Nations should be upheld and the arrangements implemented in full.

Sir Russell Johnston: Is the Prime Minister aware that many of us believe that the lengthy reply that she has just given should have been in the form of a statement which the House could have examined at greater length? Is she completely confident that the description of events that she has given us, which is being disputed by several newspapers, is absolutely accurate?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman can read for himself the report of the secretary general to the United Nations Security Council, which specifically confirmed that there has been a large-scale incursion from Angola into Namibia; he can obtain for himself a copy of the agreements to which the several member states were signatories; he can also obtain for himself a copy of the Geneva protocols which were specifically agreed to by SWAPO. All those are public knowledge, and the hon. Gentleman can get them from the Library at any time.

Q3. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Porter: As many East Anglian people are worried that Suffolk and Norfolk may miss out on the benefits of 1992 and the Channel tunnel, can my right hon. Friend reassure East Anglians on the coast that road and rail investment will not be left behind, and that the persistent long-term unemployment there will give way to the prosperity which is now being enjoyed by most other parts of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: We recognise that East Anglia is a very important area of economic growth, and our substantial and continuing programme of road improvements includes 29 schemes, worth about £220 million, in East Anglia. We have also recently approved investment in electrification from Cambridge to King's Lynn and in new rolling stock to relieve overcrowding. I am pleased to see that East Anglia now has the lowest rate of unemployment of all the regions.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall that when she started raising interest rates last year, inflation was just over 4 per cent.? It is now just under 8 per cent. What has gone wrong?

The Prime Minister: The raising of interest rates will gradually work to choke inflation down. I am the first to say that what we regard as one of our less good performances was regarded by Labour as its best.

Mr. Kinnock: On present trends, what level of interest rate will have to be charged in order to reach the right hon. Lady's objective of zero inflation?

The Prime Minister: Those who wish for specific answers on interest rates can only be seeking to help the speculators.

Q4. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will join all Conservative Members in wishing NATO a happy 40th birthday. Will she note that we encourage her to hold further discussions with President Gorbachev during his visit about the need for further and deep cuts in conventional forces and chemical weapons on the Soviet side? Will she also note that a recent opinion poll has shown widespread support for steadfast British defence policies, and that the British Government do not need to go cap in hand to Moscow to find a defence policy?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I think that most British people agree, that NATO has kept the peace successfully for 40 years. It is needed as much in the future as it was in the past. It is vital that we keep in step with America and Canada on NATO.

I agree that we must modernise our forces, including nuclear forces. NATO has already agreed that they must be modernised, on the basis that obsolete weapons do not deter. What is at issue is the precise timing of that

modernisation. I shall discuss that with Mr. Gorbavchev. The Russians have already modernised their short-range nuclear weapons.

Q5. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Vaz: The Prime Minister will recall encouraging millions of people throughout the country to buy their own council homes. Will she now put the Government's money where her mouth is or, rather, was, and provide financial assistance to constituents of mine and other hon. Members who have taken her at her word, purchased their council houses and found them to be seriously defective? Will she support people such as my constituents on the Morton estate, or will she abandon them as she has abandoned millions of people who have been deceived by the Government's policies?

The Prime Minister: Well over 1 million people have purchased their council homes at a very substantial discount and I hope that more will take advantage of that opportunity. It is an opportunity which the Labour party fought against and which was provided by this Government.

Q7. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to congratulate the designers, craftsmen and managers of Rolls-Royce, who have just won yet another huge order for aero-engines in the teeth of fierce world competition, this time for 20 Cathay Pacific Airbuses? Does this not show that British high technology products can and do sell on world markets?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I warmly congratulate Rolls-Royce on this excellent £1 billion order for engines for the Airbus and, of course, the order will also help British Aerospace. It is very good news and shows that British industry at its best can compete with the best in the world.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Prime Minister have a word today with the Secretary of State for Transport about the disgraceful decision to hold up yet again the report on the Chinook disaster, apparently at the behest of the Boeing company? Does she accept that we must have absolute faith in the integrity of official reports into accidents, for the safety of the thousands of people who use helicopters in the North sea? Will she ask the Secretary of State to make a statement to the effect that he will publish that report in full without one comma or jot changed, in order to assure us that we have that integrity?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is following the procedures laid down by Parliament in the Civil Aviation (Investigation of Accidents) Regulations 1983. Subject to any legal constraints, I expect the air accidents investigation branch report and the report of the review board to be published very shortly. The hon. Gentleman will know that publication of the reports before the contentions of the Boeing company are adequately considered would be against the regulations and could invite a conclusion that the publication might be regarded as prejudging the question of a rehearing. My right hon. Friend is following precisely the law as laid down by the House.

Q8. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the KGB defector Major Levchenko, revealed that the spying activities of the KGB reached their peak during the years of detente in the 1970s? Can she confirm that KGB espionage activities—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Give him a chance.

Mr. Riddick: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that KGB espionage activities are increasing now and have increased since President Gorbachev came to power and, indeed, since glasnost was introduced? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It does not help the hon. Member.

Mr. Riddick: Is this not a clear demonstration that, despite Mr. Gorbachev's slick PR image, the West cannot afford to lower its guard?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend is aware, we believe that defence matters do not depend on good intentions but on a sure and strong defence. We find no reduction the world over in the activities of the KGB.

Mr. Wareing: During the last football season there were 33 arrests associated with matches at Liverpool, 24 arrests at Everton and 38 at Manchester United. At Hampden Park, Glasgow, there were 152 arrests and at Ibrox Park, the home of Glasgow Rangers, there were 407 arrests. Yet it is the supporters of English clubs—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman make his question brief?

Mr. Wareing: It is the supporters of English clubs who are to be penalised by the identity card system. *[Interruption.]* Will the Prime Minister tell us where the sense is in that?

The Prime Minister: I heard the statistics given by the hon. Gentleman, but the rest of his question was drowned. Last year in England and Wales as a whole there were about 6,000 arrests and it was, therefore, important for us to take action to bring in membership cards. We have done that.

House of Fraser

Mr. Speaker: Before calling upon the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) to ask a private notice question relating to the publication of the inspectors' report on the House of Fraser, I wish to make it clear that quotations from the text of the report would contravene our sub judice rules. *[Interruption.]* Order. An appeal on this matter is to be heard in the House of Lords on 10 April. I am aware that the court has varied an injunction so that our proceedings may be reported, but that does not relieve us of the obligation to respect our own rules, and the Chair will not allow the use of alleged texts of the report while questions on its publication remain sub judice.

3.32 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham)*(by private notice)*: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the publication of the DTI inspectors' report into the affairs of the House of Fraser.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Trade and Industry (Mr. Anthony Newton): Inspectors were appointed to investigate the affairs of House of Fraser Holdings plc in April 1987. They reported to my right hon. and noble Friend on 23 July 1988. Their findings disclosed evidence of wrongdoing such that my right hon. and noble Friend felt it right to refer the report to the serious fraud office and the Director of Public Prosecutions. The prosecution authorities' inquiries are well advanced, and are proceeding as swiftly as possible under the superintendence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

Our consistent view has been that publication of the report before those inquiries were completed would interfere with the principle that all citizens of this country are entitled to a fair trial of any criminal charges that may arise from it, and would prejudice the inquiries themselves. The Court of Appeal has unanimously agreed that it was reasonable for my right hon. and noble Friend to decide not to publish the report for the time being. The court's judgment is, however, the subject of a further appeal by Lonrho, which will be heard by the House of Lords next Monday.

In the meantime, as the House is aware, Lonrho is understood to have come into possession of a copy of the report on about 23 March, and *The Observer* newspaper, owned by Lonrho, published substantial extracts from it in a special edition on 30 March, coinciding with Lonrho's annual general meeting. Both Lonrho and *The Observer* are fully aware that only my right hon. and noble Friend has the lawful authority to publish the report; that Lonrho's copy was improperly given to it and improperly used by it; and that use by Lonrho and *The Observer* would amount to a grave breach of confidence and of Crown copyright and might prejudice next week's legal proceedings in the House of Lords.

For all these reasons, my right hon. and noble Friend sought and obtained an injunction on 30 March restraining *The Observer* and Lonrho from any further publication of the special edition. He is also seeking an order for the return of the remaining copies of the report, and urgent and thorough inquiries are being made to seek to establish how the report came into Lonhro's possession.

My right hon. and noble Friend has made it abundantly clear that the report will be published at the earliest possible moment consistent with the even-handed administration of justice. The first principle in this matter must be to safeguard the proper investigation of possible criminal charges and the fair conduct of any trial should such charges be brought. I cannot believe that anyone in this House would wish to undermine that principle, or encourage others to do so.

Mr. Gould: What conceivable purpose can now be served by a continued refusal to publish the report? Is it not clear that the report has already been substantially published, that its contents are known to all those involved and affected, and that, rather than allow further publication to take place piecemeal and by drip-feed, with only the public kept in the dark, it would be better to come clean now? Is it not also clear that the Government's excuses simply do not stand up? How do they square with the admission by counsel for the Attorney-General that publication would not prejudice criminal investigations? If there were truly any substance in the argument that a fair trial would be prejudiced, bearing in mind the fact that any such trial may be years away, why did that not occur to the High Court when it considered the question? Has the Secretary of State himself not prejudiced the issue already by his admission on the radio this morning that the report discloses serious wrongdoing?

Is not the real reason an attempt to hide from the public the fact that the investigation of important takeover bids was in the hands of officials and Ministers who were incompetent and whose slap-happy attitude was no match for those who were determined to lie to them? If the inspectors' conclusion is that that sort of muddle must not be allowed to occur again, how can it be avoided without the benefit of the report and its recommendations? What confidence can we have in a Government who, instead of making amends for spectacular incompetence by coming clean, prefer to compound their errors by further incompetence and an all-too-typical recourse to cover-up?

Mr. Newton: If there were any wish to cover up, my right hon. and noble Friend would not have referred the report to the serious fraud office within a matter of days of having received it. When the hon. Gentleman suggests that there is no question of prejudicing a fair trial because the High Court made a finding in that respect, it seems to me to call into question the whole basis of the way in which we administer justice, in that three judges in the Court of Appeal subsequently found differently. That is the position at the moment.

As to the issue of serious wrongdoing, it is absolutely clear that, if there had not been evidence of wrongdoing in the report, it would not have been necessary or right to refer it to the Serious Fraud Office. Lastly, the hon. Gentleman asked me what purpose was to be served in view of what has happened. I will tell him what purpose is to be served. It is to seek to protect the fair administration of justice and the rule of law in this country. The Government cannot be absolved from that, nor should the House wish to be absolved from that, by the irresponsible behaviour of those who published the report in the way that they did.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Does not my right hon. Friend agree that the prior publication of evidence, for no better reason than to sell a newspaper or to pursue a personal vendetta, should never be a substitute for the proper prosecution of persons who are alleged to have

committed criminal offences? Is it not disgraceful how often Opposition Members side with those arrogant portions of the media who seek to place themselves above the law of the land?

Mr. Newton: I very much agree with the general tenor of my hon. and learned Friend's remarks. I must say fairly and squarely to the Opposition Front Bench that I do not believe that they would wish to prejudice the administration of justice. I hope that they will consider carefully the extent to which they may do so.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Perhaps the Minister will be kind enough to explain to me why, if the trial or potential trial of the Al-Fayeds could be prejudiced by the publication of the report, the same argument was not used in the case of the Guinness scandal or in the case of Mr. Ryan?

Mr. Newton: The issues arising from such a report must be considered in the context of the circumstances of each report, and they have been so considered. The issue of prejudice does not relate merely to proceedings on criminal charges should they be brought, but also to the hampering of current inquiries. Only last week there were signs that the publication of the report might make it impossible for inquiries to continue.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, under section 437 of the Companies Act 1985 the Secretary of State has an unfettered discretion to publish the report? If that is the case, does my right hon. Friend believe that it was wise for the noble Lord, Lord Young, to rely yesterday in the House of Lords on the statement that the prosecuting authorities would have to stop their inquiries if the report was published, when counsel for the Attorney-General said on the record in the Court of Appeal hearing that it was not true that prosecutions would have to be stopped as a result of publicity? Are we not in some confusion and in danger of entering into a second "Carry On, Spycatcher" saga?

Mr. Newton: The statement made by my right hon. and noble Friend in the House of Lords yesterday about the position of the prosecuting authorities was based on the latest statements which they had made to him and to the Department about what they thought would be the likely outcome of publication. I do not think that my right hon. and noble Friend can or should be absolved from taking that into account as a very important factor in exercising the discretion referred to by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Chancellor of the Duchy not accept that there is a discrepancy between what he is telling the House today and what the noble Lord, Lord Young, told the House yesterday? The noble Lord made no reference to the prejudice to inquiries connected with criminal investigations; he simply said that there could not be a proper jury trial if the report was published. Is the Chancellor of the Duchy accountable to the House or to the Director of Public Prosecutions? Is the Chancellor telling the House that the report will not be published while criminal proceedings are pending, if the proceedings begin and if there are appeals? Is he telling the House that there is no prospect of forming a jury from all our citizens of jury age and status to hear the evidence in this case who have not read the report on the Fayeds' case?

Mr. Newton: I am saying to the House that it is not my right hon. and noble Friend's view that the report should be published in circumstances in which it could hamper inquiries, prevent inquiries being pursued or prejudice a fair trial following the outcome of those inquiries. That remains the position. With regard to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I am afraid that he simply has not studied the statement made in the other place yesterday. My right hon. and noble Friend referred to the danger of inquiries being hampered and to the risk, at worst, that they might be brought to a halt by publication.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): While one has to admire the determination of Mr. Rowland, does my right hon. Friend agree that as the noble Lord, Lord Young, has referred the matter to the serious fraud office, there is no intention of covering things up or putting them under the carpet? Does he also agree that to give in to the pressure to publish would set a precedent which others would follow when the Government's time scale does not suit their purpose?

Mr. Newton: Yes, I do, and I believe that that is the real issue which the House should address.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Is it not ironic that a company which was once branded as the "unacceptable face of capitalism" has now, through its immense power and wealth, been able to further confirm what many people now regard to be the unacceptable face of the Government—a combination of shabby secrecy and downright inadequacy where the rigours of the marketplace are concerned? Far from hiding behind all the rhetoric about justice, is it not the case that, were it not for the fact that Lonrho could devote so many millions of pounds and call on its considerable influence and power in this country, many of the details would not have emerged in the first place? Where does individual justice in this country stand in that context?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is simply not right to suggest that the details in this report will not at some stage emerge. The only issue is at what stage it is appropriate to publish a report in a way which is consistent with the basic principle of the fair administration of justice. If the hon. Gentleman does not adhere to that, I do not know what he is doing here.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): Will the Minister make it abundantly clear whether it is the intention of the Government to publish this report after the serious fraud office inquiries, which may be a few weeks, or the determination of any possible trials and appeals, which may be four or five years? Will the Minister also say, in view of the magnitude of the lies and deception referred to in the report, how he can possibly justify not referring this again to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which was alone in having the right to recommend this investment? Finally, does he not think the points he makes about a fair trial undermine the very fair points the Government made, with the full support of this House, to Belgium and Eire, in exactly the contrary directions about Father Ryan?

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. and noble Friend made a statement at the time that he decided not to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and gave indications of why that

[Mr. Newton]

would not be appropriate. He also indicated, though, that it might be appropriate in due course for other steps to be taken in the light of the inspectors' report.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): How does the Minister respond to the statement of Lord Justice Dillon that there is a public interest in knowing that the principal shareholders of the House of Fraser are fraudulent rogues, and a public interest in knowing how Ministers came to be deceived in 1985? Does the Minister intend to invite the Governor of the Bank of England to censure Kleinwort Benson for negligence, to invite the Law Society to censure Herbert Smith for incompetence, to invite Ministers to censure civil servants for naivety and to invite the Prime Minister to censure Ministers for negligence, incompetence and naivety?

Mr. Newton: The basic public interest in this matter is in the proper investigation of any offences such as the hon. Gentleman assumed had taken place, for proper decisions to be taken about whether criminal charges should be brought, and the proper hearing of those criminal charges should they be brought. That is what the Government are seeking to bring about.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Since this exceptionally well-researched and detailed report has been in the possession of the police and the Attorney-General for more than seven months, when may we expect a decision to be taken on whether or not there is to be a prosecution?

Mr. Newton: I cannot be absolutely sure about that. The inquiries are being undertaken jointly by the serious fraud office and the Director of Public Prosecutions, with the help of the Metropolitan police. It is well known that investigations of this kind can take a great amount of time. I am encouraged, however, by the evidence that already exists that the establishment of the serious fraud office has significantly speeded these things up by comparison with what would have happened in earlier periods.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question and we have a busy day ahead of us, with a Bill under a guillotine; I will therefore allow two more questions from either side.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it not true that in 1976 Tiny Rowland and Lonrho went begging to the Department of Trade and Industry asking that the report on sanctions-busting and bribery in the case of Lonrho be not published? Why is it that the Lonrho broadsheet has refused to publish that particular information at this stage? Secondly, what business was it of the DTI inspectors to examine the family background of the Al-Fayeds? Surely their terms of reference only related to whether they had the money to purchase the store. Is it not true that, despite all the discussion in the Lonrho broadsheet, Mr. Tiny Rowland and Mr. Donald Trelford have not produced one shred of evidence to date that the money to buy the House of Fraser was not the property of the Al-Fayeds alone? They have not produced that evidence. Indeed the report that was published equally states that the inspectors were unable to establish what the facts were. Does the Minister agree that that is the case?

Mr. Newton: The first half of the hon. Gentleman's question should be addressed to Lonrho rather than to a Minister at the Dispatch Box. The rest of the hon. Gentleman's question—I understand why—clearly seeks to draw me into commenting on what the hon. Gentleman says are the contents of the report. He will understand that, for reasons inherent in my statement, I am not prepared to be drawn into such comments.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Is not the disturbing aspect of the affair not so much the unsavoury shenanigans about the ownership of a shop as the fact that it is yet another dismal example of dishonesty or gross negligence by the public servant who leaked the report? Does my right hon. Friend have the smallest hope that his inquiries will lead to the culprit?

Mr. Newton: The appropriate inquiries are well in train. I am afraid that I am not prepared to speculate about the timing or nature of the outcome.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): The Chancellor talks about prejudice, but does he agree that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry prejudiced the case by saying that the report contained evidence of wrongdoing? Will he stop hiding behind a smokescreen, publish and be damned, whatever may be the consequences for former Ministers or officials?

Mr. Newton: No, I do not for a moment accept that. As I said earlier, if it were not plain that the findings of the report show possible wrongdoing there would have been no need to refer it to the serious fraud office and the DPP in the first place. That is clear.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the view of many, including myself, who read last week's special edition of *The Observer* is that it showed a surprising lack of objectiveness? Does he agree that, even on *The Observer's* own account, there was nothing in the report for the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, but there may have been something in it for the serious fraud office, and that is the department which is now considering it?

Mr. Newton: Yes, my hon. Friend makes a fair point.

Helicopter Crash (Report)

3.52 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific, urgent and important matter, namely,

"the statement made by the Secretary of State for Transport or his Department yesterday that he intends to delay, at the request of the Boeing company, the publication of the report of the inquiry into the Chinook helicopter disaster".

In that disaster, 45 men were killed. It was the worst civil air disaster involving a helicopter and the delay in the publication of that report has caused extreme concern, particularly to those of my constituents with relatives who were involved in the disaster.

There has been no explanation for the delay in the publication of the report except the fact that Boeing has made its request because it appears to feel that it prejudices certain legal proceedings that are under way. I find that difficult to accept, for a number of reasons.

First, the majority of the facts in the case which were the subject of the investigation were canvassed in the Aberdeenshire court on the hearing of the fatal accident inquiry into the disaster in 1987. Secondly, the delay in publication prejudices the implementation of the report's findings. Some 30,000 men work in the North sea and travel to work by helicopter. If there are lessons to be learned, we want the report to be published so that those lessons can be implemented immediately.

Considerable anguish has been caused to relatives. I have spoken to one of those relatives, a constituent of mine, who lost her husband in the disaster. She is involved in legal action, both in this country and in the United States, against Boeing—together with all the other relatives who lost a loved one in the disaster. Those legal proceedings have caused considerable trauma. Part of the reason for the increase in that trauma is the failure to publish the report.

The publication date of 5 April has been known for many months, and legal proceedings have been further delayed as a result of the delay in the report's publication, causing considerable anguish. When I spoke to that lady this morning, she found it very difficult to believe that the only reason for non-publication is pressure from a multinational company. We have heard already today about the suppression of reports and of the concern that that causes to the House and to the country at large. This appears to be another example of pressure from a multinational causing delay.

We all appreciate that inquiries and reports must be respected, believed and accepted by the general public, and that their integrity is extremely important. In this case, pressure from a multinational company to delay publication of a report must lead us to question its integrity. For all those reasons, the matter is of sufficient importance and urgency for me to request the Adjournment of the House to debate the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the delayed publication of the report of the inquiry into the Chinook helicopter crash in the Shetlands in November 1986.

I listened with great care to the hon. Gentleman. As he knows, my sole duty in considering an application under Standing Order No. 20 is to decide whether it should be given precedence over the business set down for this evening or for tomorrow. I regret that the matter raised does not meet the requirements of Standing Order No. 20, so I cannot submit his application to the House.

Point of Order

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that a new parliamentary building is being prepared across the road from the House. I wonder what jurisdiction you have in that respect, because it was reported to me that, in order to celebrate 40 years of NATO, somebody hung up a banner proclaiming

"Get out of NATO. No nukes here"

which I thought was pretty good for a start. I wondered whether you, Mr. Speaker, had authorised that banner to be hung up, or whether it has something to do with honouring Gorbachev's visit.

Mr. Speaker: I have a pretty good view from my residence.

Mr. Skinner: Did you see that banner, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: No, I did not see it.

Re-Enfranchisement of the People

3.57 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to restore a full franchise.

Signs that electoral registration is not as healthy as it ought to be come from three sources: first, an examination of recent returns from electoral registration officers; secondly, comments from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys—although I shall mention only one of them now; thirdly, an assessment of the impact and purposes of the poll tax legislation. Those combined sources show that we are heading for a democratic and constitutional crisis over the state of the franchise.

As to the evidence from electoral returns, in Scotland —where the poll tax has been a serious issue since the 1987 general election, causing the Tories to suffer many crushing defeats in that election—there has been an alarming drop in electoral registration. In each year from 1979 to 1987, there was a steady increase in the size of the Scottish electorate, yet 62,000 names have disappeared from the registers since 1987. That includes a drop of 25,000 in Glasgow, or 4·4 per cent. in the number previously registered. The loss of electors in Scotland seems to have little to do with demographic factors such as the balance between the death of electors and new 18-year-old electors being added to the register.

Commenting on the loss of electors between 1987 and 1988, when there was a loss of 27,500 in Scotland, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, in its "Electoral Statistics", published in 1988, said:

"this does not appear to have arisen from demographic causes",

such as I have already mentioned. There has been little change in the number of 18-year-olds coming on to the register and no dramatic fall in the total population.

England and Wales have not yet been subjected to massive agitation on the poll tax but, with poll tax registration starting, that concern will dominate the coming county council and European elections. A drop in registration in England and Wales could follow. A recent MORI survey in Manchester showed that up to 10 per cent. of the people would refuse to register electorally as the poll tax and electoral registers are seen as linked, and are in fact linked. But even now, there could be something to hide about the 1989 electoral registration figures. Given that district council registration figures are to be published at the end of this month and constituency figures at the end of May, why can the House not be supplied with at least the district figures which are shortly to be published and which have been available locally since 15 February?

I raised this matter during business questions on 16 March and in a question for written answer on 28 February, when no information was supplied. It is also a matter that I have since pursued with the Leader of the House with no success. There are indications in areas such as Liverpool of serious worry about the number of people appearing on the electoral register, with perhaps as many as 10 per cent. having disappeared in the past year. This information is available and should be published and made available to the House so that hon. Members can examine its implications.

The main purpose of my Bill is to separate the poll tax register from the electoral register, making it illegal for poll tax registrars to make use of electoral registers. This will only partly overcome the problem that I have highlighted, for poll tax registrars and electoral registrars can be the same persons, carrying information from each register in their heads. Only a full repeal of the poll tax legislation, which would be a major money Bill, can remove the evil of the inevitable link between the poll tax register and the electoral register.

The whole aim and purpose of the poll tax has been to attempt to fiddle the democratic and constitutional structure of this country. It has pushed poorer people off the register and continues to do so. It is taxing people to qualify them to vote, something which we have not seen since universal franchise was established here in 1918 and 1928—although before those dates there were such things as 40-shilling freeholds in the nineteenth century. It will destroy local government and civil liberties and will manipulate local government election results. It contains a centralising power of an outrageous kind. It taxes people against the norms of all western democratic systems, which is itself an abuse of democratic and constitutional government.

It is utterly disgusting that forms filled in for electoral registration purposes should be used for purposes not included on those forms. That principle extends beyond the poll tax, so my Bill will also outlaw the sale of electoral registers for commercial purposes or for any reasons other than electoral purposes. Many people add notes to their electoral registration forms, asking for their names to be kept away from commercial interests, but there is nothing that a returning officer can do about such requests. The law should respect that wish for all people, without their needing to ask for a special dispensation.

Past Government policy on local government finance and the current poll tax legislation also hit at the funds available for electoral registration officers to conduct their essential work. My Bill will ensure that registration officers receive adequate back-up facilities in terms of canvassing provisions to contact potential voters and assist them to complete their electoral returns.

Further encouragement can be given by positive leading advertising campaigns for registration by the Home Office, and my Bill will provide for that. Let us compare the limited advertising poster campaigns and leafleting on electoral registration with the campaign being conducted by Abbey National to get people to vote on turning the company into a plc. Let us compare the Government's expenditure on advertising the poll tax, the Education Reform Act and numerous other measures with the amount spent on extending the franchise. Money is often spent on measures before they become law. Let us compare the advertising expenditure on privatisation—for instance, on softening up the market for water and electricity—with what we spend on encouraging people to have the right to vote. Should not advertising the franchise be given similar attention?

I ask all democrats to support by Bill, which seeks to establish a universal franchise as far as is currently possible. To achieve its full aim, however, another Bill will have to be added to it, for the repeal of the poll tax—and its time will come.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Martin Redmond, Mr. Max Madden, Mr. Eric S. Heffer,

Mr. Ken Livingstone, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Bernie Grant, Mr. Dennis Skinner, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Mr. Jimmy Wray and Mr. Harry Cohen.

RE-ENFRANCHISEMENT OF THE PEOPLE

Mr. Harry Barnes accordingly presented a Bill to restore a full franchise: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 5 May and to be printed. [Bill 110.]

Orders of the Day

Water Bill

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered

Clause 163

PAYMENTS TO EXISTING PENSION FUND

4.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): I beg to move amendment No. 89, in page 162, line 20, after 'who', insert—

'(a)'.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may take Government amendments Nos. 90 to 93.

Mr. Moynihan: The purpose of the first two amendments, Nos. 89 and 90, is to secure the future of pension payments of former officers or employees of the Water Research Centre, the Water Authorities Association, the Water Industry Training Association, British Water International Limited, the International Association on Water Pollution Research and Control and the International Water Supply Association, known collectively as "the admitted bodies".

As has already been announced, the water authorities superannuation fund will be administered from the transfer date by the National Rivers Authority, and this arrangement includes the second fund for the admitted bodies. The amendments proposed to clause 163 allow the Secretary of State to make orders designating the admitted bodies so that the powers and duties of the Secretary of State under that clause are extended to apply to their fund.

The purpose of the other three amendments in the group is to allow discretionary payments made by water authorities by analogy with pension payments and the unfunded pensions administered by the Severn-Trent water authority to be continued after privatisation of the water industry. These unfunded payments can be divided into three categories.

In addition to their obligations under the local government superannuation scheme, water authorities currently pay certain non-funded discretionary awards including gratuity awards, injury allowance, retirement compensation, added years pension enhancement, and a number of other benefits and associated pension increase payments to their own former employees and to employees of antecedent bodies.

They are also responsible for pensions and pension increase benefits to former National Water Council employees and board members and former water authority chairmen and members. These payments, except for a small proportion of non-funded discretionary awards, are administered by the Severn-Trent water authority and the cost recharged to each authority according to the incidence of payment or according to a statutory formula.

The second category is that of pension payments made directly by water authorities. Some pension payments are

[Mr. Moynihan]

made directly by water authorities, unlike those in the previous category which are administered by the Severn-Trent water authority, and the costs shared between authorities.

Then there is the important group of payments made by local authorities. Local authorities currently pay pensions increases, allowances and gratuities in respect of former employees whose employment functions were transferred to the water industry in 1974, and then recharge the cost to the water authorities.

Our objective in these amendments is to ensure that no pensioner is disadvantaged by the act of transfer of liability from a water authority to its successor company and that the responsibility for payment is clear both to the recipient and to the body which will be responsible for payment.

The amendments therefore provide broad powers to make regulations to encompass all people or classes of people in respect of whom such pensions and discretionary payments are made, and to impose a duty on the National Rivers Authority and on successor companies or nominated holding companies to continue to make payments awarded by water authorities.

Regulations which impose requirements on companies may be met only while the companies are wholly owned by the Crown. The administration for the first category of payments—that is, discretionary awards largely administered by Severn-Trent and unfunded pensions administered by Severn-Trent—will be transferred to the National Rivers Authority.

The amendments provide that the Secretary of State will be responsible for providing the funds, out of money supplied by Parliament, for payments made by the NRA, and the administration costs. In the other two categories —where local authorities make payments in respect of former employees and then recharge the cost to water authorities, and where water authorities are making pension payments directly to pensioners—the responsibilities for payment are clear to those concerned.

I see no reason to disturb those arrangements. On transfer date, those responsibilities will pass to the successor companies under schemes made under schedule 2 to the Bill. These amendments are designed to ensure that no pensioner is inadvertently disadvantaged by the transfer of liabilities.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The Minister is making the position clear for existing pensioners. Does he agree that it is equally important for the Bill to include provisions to ensure that existing and future employees enjoy the same protection? That will not be the position.

Mr. Moynihan: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's conclusion. He wants the Government to introduce proposals which will secure pension arrangements for those who retire in the future as good as the current pension arrangements under the local government superannuation scheme. We have repeatedly given assurances that a mirror image scheme, which we discussed at length in Committee, will not be approved by the Secretary of State unless it gives proper effect to the Government's commitment to provide employees with the same benefits.

I think that the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) would like these arrangements to have statutory backing for the future. We have made it clear that we do not believe that, in the context of privatisation, such statutory backing would be appropriate. It is via the trustees that we intend to pursue pension arrangements for the future. Given the commitment that I have given on behalf of the Secretary of State, I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that the trustees will, almost by definition, have a duty to pensioners. They could be sued for breach of trust if they did not, through the mirror image schemes, provide for pensioners in the future the same position as is accorded under the current arrangements.

4.15 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I appreciate that the debate on this point is going on a little bit, but may I ask my hon. Friend whether it is not the case that, from now, if any employee is at any time dissatisfied with his pension arrangements, it will be open to him, as a result of recent legislation, to take out a personal pension as an alternative? That is an important safeguard, and a further measure of what might be called comparative competition in this respect.

Mr. Moynihan: What my hon. Friend has said about comparative competition is an imaginative and accurate reflection. The possibility of opting out and joining a water plc scheme is very definitely there. What we are looking at today is the alternative for the employees who do not wish to opt out.

In Committee and on the Floor of the House, hon. Members have argued very strongly that mirror image schemes must provide employees with the same benefits. When the money resolution was being debated on the Floor of the House, we said that a substantial amount of money—a figure of up to £800 million was mentioned—may be necessary in order to meet the commitment that I have given today.

Amendment No. 91, to clause 183, is consequential. The clause provides the transfer date as the commencement date for schedule 23 generally. The amendment makes an exception of subordinate legislation, permitting it to be made in advance of the transfer date.

I very much hope that the clarification of what are detailed and technical amendments, and my responses to hon. Members who have intervened, have assisted the House. What we are debating are effectively peripheral pension arrangements, and I hope that the House will welcome the additional assurances that have been given.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Opposition Members believe that no pensioner should be disadvantaged as a result of this legislation. Taking at face value the particular changes that the Minister has outlined, we should not wish to quibble at all. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) that the certainties for pensioners should be applied equally to those people who are currently employed by water authorities.

What I want to know, specifically, is whether those people who have been transferred from the water authorities to the NRA will get exactly the same kind of treatment as other employees, given that, in respect of the

sale of shares in particular, they did not get the same treatment. I should welcome some clarification from the Minister on particular points concerning those people.

Mr. Pike: The amendments in this group are obviously very important. They affect the rights of existing pensioners, some of whom used to work for local authorities when those bodies were responsible for water services prior to reorganisation in 1974. Of course, there are pensioners who have retired since then, and there are people who have earned a lot of pension. We understand exactly what the Minister's amendments seek to do. They go some way towards clarifying the Bill as it was debated in Committee.

The Minister was absolutely right about the key part of my intervention a few moments ago. The crucial difference, of course, is the statutory protection for those people who currently work in the industry and for those who may come into it in the future. Certainly, the amendments do not go as far in that direction as we should like. It may be that the fall of the guillotine at 5.30 pm will make it impossible for us to reach an amendment in the next group. I hope that the Minister recognises that both Opposition Members and some Conservative Members are genuinely concerned about this matter, as are the employees in the industry.

Ministers have referred to the mirror image pension scheme. They are confident that the trustees will be able to protect employees, but many of us doubt whether that will happen. If the Ministers were right there would be no argument, but people who have worked for many years in the industry fear that, when the Bill becomes law, the agreements will be changed, that the documents that provide for future pension provision will not be so good as they are now and that there will be no mirror image pension scheme.

If the Secretary of State and the other Ministers really wanted a mirror image pension scheme to put in place, they could easily amend the Bill and introduce a statutory requirement that there should be such a scheme. The Government ought to be prepared to move in that direction because it would meet the fears of those who work in the industry. The Government need to go further than they have already gone if they are to gain the confidence of the workers in the industry.

The private water companies may prove to be the biggest cause for concern. There is no guarantee that employees will be able to become trustees of the pension schemes, although the trustees ultimately decide these matters. After privatisation, pensions and conditions of service will have to be negotiated between employers and trade unions on behalf of the employees. Ministers have given us many assurances during our debates. I was assured in Committee that the Government would not approve any scheme that did not meet our fears. Unless the Bill is amended to meet those fears, our predictions will be fulfilled. I hope, therefore, that the Government will be prepared to meet the genuine fears of the employees in the industry.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): I welcome the amendments, particularly on behalf of former employees of the water authorities. In my constituency there are former employees of Severn-Trent and Welsh Water. I understand that the pension arrangements of employees of Severn-Trent are different from those of other authorities. I hope that the Minister will take them into account.

Mr. Moynihan: I am happy to give the confirmation that the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) has sought. Those differences will be taken fully into account and will be mirrored—hence the phrase "mirror image". I was passed a number of pieces of paper during the speech of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). I am slightly concerned that the collective age of the admirable experts who have assisted us throughout the passage of the Bill may be closer to retirement age than the collective age of the Opposition Front Bench spokesman and myself. With a bit of luck, our collective ages are still short of retirement age. That, however, has not denied us the opportunity to study this subject in great depth and to be able to respond without notes to the important points that have been raised.

It is appropriate to place on record a little more detail about the mirror image scheme. I understand the concerns of the hon. Member for Burnley. That is why we have sought new provisions to give the hon. Gentleman and others who are concerned about the scheme not being enshrined in legislation further reassurance.

It has been suggested that the Government's commitment to the preservation of existing pension rights and the adoption of future changes in the local government superannuation scheme in the mirror image scheme would be best ensured, as the hon. Member for Burnley said, by statutory provision. I mentioned earlier that that view does not accord with the principles of privatisation and has not been part of privatisation legislation.

It is customary in the private sector for pension schemes to be safeguarded under trust deed by trustees. This, therefore, is the way in which the mirror image scheme will operate. It would be anomalous to require a small number of companies in the private sector to be subject to legislative requirements for the running of a pension scheme for only some of their employees. We have repeatedly given assurances that the mirror image scheme will not be approved by the Secretary of State unless it gives proper effect to the Government's commitment that it will provide employees with the same benefits, including full index-linking, with the same level of employees' contributions at the transfer date.

It has always been our intention that water authority employees' pension rights should be safeguarded. We now propose that further security for future rights will be provided by the terms of the trust deed. We have agreed with all the chairmen of the water authorities to provisions which will give particular reassurance. These are, first, that the trustees of the mirror image scheme should include at least two representatives of members; and secondly, that while there remain potential beneficiaries of the mirror image scheme, it should not be wound up or its benefits altered if any trustee objects. Representatives of members are more appropriate than representatives of employees, because there will come a time when there are no employees in the scheme. They will all have retired but they will still be members of the scheme drawing their benefits from it.

I am specifically not requiring trustees to be representatives of trade union members, but I am not excluding that possibility if they happen to be appropriate

[Mr. Moynihan]

representatives of members. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that a pension scheme operated in this way will provide satisfactory assurance to employees who have chosen to transfer to the mirror image scheme.

NRA employees will continue in the local government superannuation scheme as if nothing had happened. In other words, there will be complete continuity.

I hope I have answered the two major points that have been raised.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 90, in page 162, line 21,, at end insert

'or

(b) have ceased to be officers or employees of any person designated for the purposes of this paragraph by order made by the Secretary of State.

(1A) The Secretary of State shall not make an order designating a person for the purposes of subsection (1)(b) above unless that person appears to him to be a person whose activities at any time before the transfer date consisted in, or were connected with, the carrying out of any function which is transferred by this Act or which corresponds to any such function or to any other function under this Act; and the power to make such an order shall be exercisable by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Moynihan]*.

Clause 164

General restrictions on disclosure of information

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 164, line 15 at end insert

'or to any information exclusively of a statistical nature'.—

No. 41, in page 164, line 21, at end insert—

'(6) Subject to subsection (7) below, nothing in this section shall preclude the disclosure of information—

(a) if the disclosure is of information relating to a matter connected with the carrying out of the functions of a water undertaker or sewage undertaker and is made by one Minister of the Crown or government department to another; or

(b) if the disclosure is for the purpose of enabling or assisting any public or other authority for the time being designated for the purposes of this section by an order made by the Secretary of State to discharge any functions which are specified in the order.

(7) The power to make an order under subsection (6) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament; and where such an order designates an authority for the purposes of paragraph (b) of that subsection, the order may—

(a) impose conditions subject to which the disclosure of information is permitted by virtue of that paragraph; and

(b) otherwise restrict the circumstances in which disclosure is so permitted.'—*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Clause 178

General interpretation

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move amendment No. 58, in page 171, line 29, leave out 'alongside' and insert 'in the close vicinity of'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 59.

Mr. Moynihan: The amendments meet a commitment that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) in Committee on 7 March. They make it clear that telecommunications apparatus for use solely in connection with the operation of undertakers' pipes may be laid not just alongside but generally in the close vicinity of pipes. Hon. Members who served on the Committee will no doubt recall our important debate there. I promised to look carefully at the point that my hon. Friend raised, not least because, as he pointed out, the water undertakers do not necessarily lay the equipment at the same time as the water main, and it is not necessarily very close. It may be as close as 2 m to the water main, but it may be as far away as five. As my hon. Friend mentioned, the problem with the original drafting of the Bill was that clause 178 made it clear that the equipment had to be placed alongside. We recognise that that is not necessarily in the interests of those who are placing the new telephone apparatus and who might want it to be above or underneath the main.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 59, in page 171, line 30, leave out 'alongside' and insert 'in the close vicinity of'.—*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Clause 180

Local statutory provisions: consequential amendments etc

4.30 pm

Amendment made: No. 57, in page 177, line 14, at end insert—

'(3A) Nothing in any order under this section may abrogate or curtail the effect of so much of any local statutory provision as confers any right of way or confers on or preserves for the public—

(a) any right of enjoyment of air, exercise or recreation on land; or

(b) any right of access to land for the purposes of exercise or recreation.'.—*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Clause 183

Short title, commencement and extent

Amendment made: No. 91, in page 179, line 1, after '23', insert

'except so far as relating to the making of subordinate legislation'.—*[Mr Moynihan.]*

Amendment made: No. 11—new schedule—

'Water Quality in Scotland

1. In the Water (Scotland) Act 1980, after section 76, there shall be inserted the following Part—

"Part VIA

Quality of Water

Duties of water authorities with respect to water quality.

76A.—(1) It shall be the duty of a water authority—

(a) when supplying water to any premises for domestic purposes to supply only water which is wholesome at the time of supply; and

(b) so far as reasonably practicable, to ensure, in relation to each source or combination of sources from which that authority supplies water to premises for domestic purposes, that there is, in general, no deterioration in the quality of the water which is supplied from time to time from that source or combination of sources.

(2) For the purposes of this section and section 76B below and subject to subsection (3) below, water supplied by a water authority to any premises shall not be regarded as unwholesome at the time of supply where it has ceased to be wholesome only after leaving the authority's pipes.

(3) For the purposes of this section where water supplied by a water authority to any premises would not otherwise be regarded as unwholesome at the time of supply, that water shall be regarded as unwholesome at that time if—

(a) it has ceased to be wholesome after leaving the authority's pipes but while in a pipe which is subject to water pressure from a main or which would be so subject but for the closing of some valve; and

(b) it has so ceased in consequence of the failure of the authority, before supplying the water, to take such steps as may be prescribed for the purpose of securing the elimination or reduction to a minimum of any prescribed risk that the water would cease to be wholesome after leaving the authority's pipes.

(4) The provisions of this section shall apply in relation to water which is supplied by a water authority whether or not the water is water which the authority is required to supply by virtue of any provision of this Act.

Regulations for preserving water quality

76B.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations require a water authority to take all steps as may be prescribed for the purpose of securing compliance with section 76A above; and, without prejudice to the generality of that power, regulations under this subsection may impose an obligation on a water authority—

(a) to take all such steps as may be prescribed for monitoring and recording whether the water which that authority supplies to premises for domestic purposes is wholesome at the time of supply;

(b) to take all such steps as may be prescribed for monitoring and recording the quality of the water from any source, or combination of sources, which that authority uses or is proposing to use for supplying water to any premises for domestic purposes;

(c) to ensure that a source which that authority is using or proposing to use for supplying water for domestic purposes is not so used until prescribed requirements for establishing the quality of water which may be supplied from that source have been complied with;

(d) to keep records of the localities within which all the premises supplied with water for domestic purposes by that authority are normally supplied from the same source or combination of sources;

(e) to comply with prescribed requirements with respect to the analysis of water samples or with respect to internal reporting or organisational arrangements.

(2) Without prejudice to subsection (1) above, the Secretary of State may by regulations make provision with respect to the use by water authorities, for the purposes of or in connection with the carrying out of their functions, of such processes and substances, and of products that contain or are made with such substances or materials, as he considers might affect the quality of any water; and, without prejudice to the generality of that power, regulations under this subsection may—

(a) forbid the use by water authorities of processes, substances and products which have not been approved under the regulations or which contravene the regulations;

(b) for the purpose of provision made by virtue of paragraph (a) above, require processes, substances and products used by water authorities to conform to such standards as may be prescribed by or approved under the regulations;

(c) impose such other requirements as may be prescribed with respect to the use by water authorities of prescribed processes, substances and products;

(d) provide for the giving, refusal and revocation, by prescribed persons, of approvals required for the purposes of the regulations, for such approvals to be capable of being made subject to such conditions as may be prescribed and for the modification and revocation of any such condition;

(e) impose obligations to furnish prescribed persons with information reasonably required by those persons for the purpose of carrying out functions under the regulations; and

(f) require prescribed charges to be paid to persons carrying out functions under the regulations.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations require a water authority—

(a) to publish information about the quality of water supplied for domestic purposes to any premises by that authority; and

(b) to provide information to prescribed persons about the quality of water so supplied.

(4) Regulations under subsection (3) above—

(a) shall prescribe both the information which is to be published or provided in pursuance of the regulations and the manner and circumstances in which it is to be published or provided;

(b) may require the provision of information by a water authority to any person to be free of charge or may authorise it to be subject to the payment by that person to the authority of a prescribed charge; and

(c) may impose such other conditions on the provision of information by a water authority to any person as may be prescribed.

Provision of water where piped supplies insufficient or unwholesome

76C.—(1) Where—

(a) it is not practicable at reasonable cost for a water authority, by supplying water in pipes, to provide or maintain such a supply of wholesome water to any particular premises in its limits of supply as (so far as those premises are concerned) is sufficient for domestic purposes;

(b) it is practicable at reasonable cost for the authority to provide such a supply to those premises otherwise than in pipes;

(c) the insufficiency or unwholesomeness of the supply of water for domestic purposes to those premises is such as to cause a danger to life or health; and

(d) the local authority in whose area those premises are situated notify the water authority of that danger and require the water authority to provide a supply otherwise than in pipes,

it shall be the duty of the water authority, for such period as may be required by that local authority, to provide any supply to those premises which it is practicable at reasonable cost to provide otherwise than in pipes and which it is required to provide by that local authority.

(2) Where under subsection (1) above a local authority require the provision by a water authority of a supply of water to any premises, that local authority—

(a) shall be liable to the water authority for any charges payable in respect of the provision of that supply; but

(b) shall have power to recover the whole or any part of any charges paid by virtue of this subsection from the owner or occupier of the premises to which the supply is provided.

(3) In this section references to the provision of a supply of water to any premises otherwise than in pipes shall have effect, in a case in which it is practicable at reasonable cost to provide a supply (whether or not in pipes) to a place within a reasonable distance of those premises, as including references to the provision of a supply to that place.

Enforcement of sections 76A to 76C

76D.—(1) This section applies to enforcement of the duties of water authorities under sections 76A and 76C(1) and under regulations made under section 76B.

(2) Without prejudice to its generality, section 11 above (power of Secretary of State to make a default order) shall have effect, subject to the following provisions of this section, for the enforcement by the Secretary of State of the duties referred to in subsection (1) above.

(3) The Secretary of State may make an order under subsection (2) of section 11 without having caused a local inquiry to be held into the matter.

(4) The Secretary of State shall not make an order under subsection (2) of section 11 if he is satisfied—

(a) that the failures complained of were of a trivial nature; or

(b) that the water authority have agreed to take and are taking all such steps as it appears to the Secretary of

State to be appropriate, for the time being, for them to take for the purpose of securing or facilitating compliance with these duties.

General functions of local authorities in relation to water quality

76E.—(1) It shall be the duty of every local authority to take all such steps as they consider appropriate for keeping themselves informed about the wholesomeness and sufficiency of water supplies provided to premises in their area, including every private supply to any such premises.

(2) It shall be the duty of a local authority to notify any water authority of anything appearing to the local authority to suggest—

(a) that any supply by that water authority of water for domestic purposes to any premises in the area of that local authority is, has been, or is likely to become unwholesome or (so far as any such premises are concerned) insufficient for those purposes;

(b) that the unwholesomeness or insufficiency of any such supply is, was or is likely to be such as to cause a danger to life or health; or

(c) that the duty imposed on that undertaker by virtue of section 76A(1)(b) above is being, has been or is likely to be so contravened as to affect any supply of water to premises in that area;

and it shall be the duty of a local authority to require the provision of a supply in pursuance of section 76C above whenever, in a case falling within paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of that section, it is satisfied, in relation to any premises in their area, as to the matters specified in paragraphs (b) and (c) of that subsection.

(3) Where a local authority have notified a water authority of any such matter as is mentioned in subsection (2) above, it shall be the duty of that local authority, if they are not satisfied that all such remedical action as is appropriate will be taken by the water authority, to inform the Secretary of State about the contents of the notification.

(4) It shall be the duty of a local authority to comply with any direction given by the Secretary of State to that local authority or to local authorities generally as to—

(a) the cases and circumstances in which they are or are not to exercise any of the powers conferred on them by this Part in relation to private supplies; and

(b) the manner in which those powers are to be exercised.

(5) The Secretary of State may by regulations make such provision, supplementing the provisions of this section, as he considers appropriate for—

(a) imposing duties and conferring powers on local authorities with respect to the acquisition of information about the quality and sufficiency of water supplies provided to premises in their areas; and

(b) regulating the performance of any duty imposed by or under this section.

(6) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (5) above, regulations under that subsection may—

(a) prescribe the matters to be taken into account by a local authority in determining, for the purposes of subsection (1) above, what is appropriate;

(b) provide, for the purposes of the exercise or performance of any power or duty conferred or imposed on a local authority by or under this section, for such samples of water to be taken and analysed at such times and in such manner as may be prescribed;

(c) authorise local authorities to exercise or perform any such power or duty through prescribed persons;

(d) provide for the recovery by a local authority, from prescribed persons, of such amounts as may be prescribed in respect of expenses reasonably incurred by the authority in the exercise of any such power or the performance of any such duty.

REMEDIAL POWERS OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN RELATION TO PRIVATE SUPPLIES

76F.—(1) Subject to the following provisions of this section, where a local authority are satisfied in relation to any premises in their area which are supplied with water for domestic purposes by means of a private supply—

(a) that any water which is being, has been or is likely to be supplied for those purposes to those premises by means of that private supply is not, was not or, as the case may be, is not likely to be wholesome; or

(b) that that private supply is failing, has failed or is likely to fail to provide to any house on those premises such a supply of wholesome water as (so far as that house is concerned) is sufficient for domestic purposes,

the local authority may serve a notice in relation to that private supply on one or more of the relevant persons.

(2) A notice under this section in relation to a private supply of water to any premises shall—

(a) give particulars of the matters mentioned in subsection (1) above in respect of which the notice is served;

(b) specify the steps which, in the opinion of the local authority serving the notice, are required to be taken for ensuring that there is a supply of water to those premises which is both wholesome and (so far as any house on those premises is concerned) sufficient for domestic purposes;

(c) specify a period ending not less than 28 days after the day on which the notice is served within which any representations or objections with respect to the notice must be received by that local authority; and

(d) state the effect in relation to that notice of section 76G(2) and (3) below.

(3) Subject to section 76G below, where a local authority serve a notice under this section on any relevant person they may do one or more of the following, that is to say—

(a) by that notice designate as steps to be taken by the authority themselves such of the steps specified in the notice as they consider it appropriate to so designate;

(b) by that notice require that person, within such reasonable period as may be specified in the notice, to take one or more of the steps so specified;

(c) by that notice require that person, at such times as may be determined in accordance with provision contained in the notice, to make to another relevant person or to that authority such payments as may be so determined in respect of expenses reasonably incurred by that other person or that authority in taking any step specified in the notice;

(d) by that notice undertake from time to time to make such payments to that person as may be so determined in respect of expenses reasonably incurred by that person in taking any step specified in the notice.

(4) The power of a local authority to serve a notice under this section specifying the steps which are required to be taken in relation to any source from which a private supply is provided both to premises in the area of that authority and to premises in the area of another local authority shall be exercisable only where—

(a) the other authority consent to the service of the notice; or

(b) the authorities act jointly in exercising their respective powers under this section in relation to that source.

(5) The powers conferred by this section and section 76G below shall be so exercised in relation to a private supply of water to any premises where there is no house as to secure that no local authority are required to bear any of the expenses incurred (whether by the authority or by any other person) in taking any steps for ensuring that the supply is wholesome which are specified in any notice under this section.

(6) The steps that a relevant person may be required by a notice under this section to take in relation to any premises shall include—

(a) requiring a supply of water to be provided to those premises by a water authority or by any other person; and

(b) taking such steps for the purpose of securing that such a requirement is complied with, and of enabling such a supply to be so provided, as may be specified in the notice.

(7) For the purposes of this section and section 76G below the relevant persons, in relation to a private supply of water to any premises in the area of a local authority, are the owners and occupiers of those premises and (whether or not the source of the private supply is in that authority's area) the owners and occupiers of the premises where that source is situated and any other person who exercises powers of management or control in relation to that source.

Effect confirmation and variation of notice under section 76F

76G.—(1) Subject to subsection (2) below, a notice served by a local authority under section 76F above shall not take effect until the end of the period specified in the notice as the period within which representations or objections with respect to the notice must be received by that authority.

(2) Where any written representation or objection with respect to a notice by a local authority under section 76F above is received by the authority, before the end of the period specified in the notice, from a person on whom the notice was served, that notice shall not take effect unless—

(a) the notice is submitted by the authority to the Secretary of State and is confirmed by him either with or without modifications; or

(b) the representation or objection is withdrawn.

(3) If a local authority submit a notice under section 76F above to the Secretary of State for confirmation, the Secretary of State—

(a) shall consider whether the notice should be confirmed and whether, if it is confirmed, it should be confirmed with or without modifications;

(b) may, with respect to the matters specified in the notice or any proposed modification of it, direct the local authority to serve a notice under section 76F above, in such terms as may be specified in the direction, on any relevant person who has not previously been so served;

(c) may, for the purposes of paragraph (a) or (b) above—

(i) cause a local inquiry to be held; or

(ii) afford to the local authority and to every person who has made representations or objections with respect to the notice or a proposed direction under paragraph (b) above an opportunity of appearing before, and being heard by, a person appointed by the Secretary of State for the purpose;

and

(d) if he is satisfied that the person on whom any notice to be served in pursuance of a direction under paragraph (b) above has had a proper opportunity of having his representations or objections with respect to the proposal for the direction considered, dispense in relation to the notice so served with the provisions of subsections (1) and (2) above and of section 76F(2)(c) and (d) above.

(4) Where the Secretary of State confirms a notice under section 76F above (whether with or without modifications)

(a) he, or if he so directs, the local authority concerned shall serve notice of that confirmation on every person originally served with the notice under that section; and

(b) that notice shall take effect, with any modifications made by the Secretary of State, at such times as may be specified in the notice served under this subsection.

(5) Where any relevant person who is required by virtue of a notice under section 76F above to take any step in relation to any premises fails to take that step within the period specified in the notice, the authority which served the notice may, in accordance with any applicable provision having effect by virtue of section 76H below, take that step themselves.

(6) Where any step is taken by a local authority in relation to any premises by virtue of subsection (5) above—

(a) the authority may recover from the person who failed to take that step within the specified period any expenses reasonably incurred by the authority in taking that step; and

(b) for the purposes of any requirement under which payments are required to be made to that person by any person other than the authority, sums paid by virtue of paragraph (a) above in respect of the taking of any step shall be deemed to be expenses incurred in the taking of that step by the person who failed to take it.

(7) Nothing in this Act shall confer any right of action on any person in respect of any loss or damage sustained by that person in consequence of the failure by any other person to take any step specified in a notice under section 76F above; but any sum required to be paid to any person by virtue of any requirement or undertaking contained in such a notice shall be recoverable by that person from the person who is required to pay it.

(8) Any requirement which is imposed by virtue of a notice under section 76F above on the owner or occupier of any premises and is expressed to bind those premises in relation to the owners or occupiers from time to time shall bind successive owners or, as the case may be, occupiers of those premises; and section 65 above (power of local authority to make a charging order in respect of costs) shall apply to a requirement under section 64 above.

(9) Subject to subsection (10) below, a local authority may be notice served on any person modify or revoke the effect in relation to that person of any notice under section 76F above or this subsection (including a notice which has been confirmed, with or without modifications, by the Secretary of State).

(10) Section 76F(2)(c) and (d) and subsections (1) to (4) above shall apply, as they apply in relation to a notice under section 76F above, in relation to any notice served by a local authority on any person under subsection (9) above except where the notice—

(a) extends the period within which any step is required to be taken by that person; or

(b) discharges, postpones or abates any obligation of that person to make a payment to the local authority.

Incidental powers of local authorities

76H.—(1) Subject to subsection (5) below, a local authority may serve on any person a notice requiring him to furnish that authority, within a period or at times specified in the notice and in a form and manner so specified, with such information as is reasonably required by that authority for the purpose of exercising or performing any power or duty conferred or imposed on that authority by or under any of sections 76E to 76G above.

(2) Any person designated in writing for the purpose by any local authority may—

(a) enter any premises for the purpose, in relation to any private supply, of—

(i) determining whether, and if so in what manner, any power or duty conferred or imposed on that authority by or under any of sections 76E to 76G above should be exercised or performed; or

(ii) exercising any such power or performing any such duty;

(b) enter any premises to which a supply of water is provided by a water authority for the purpose, in relation to a supply so provided, of determining whether, and if so in what manner, such a power should be exercised or such a duty performed or of exercising such a power or performing such a duty; or

(c) carry out such inspections, measurements and tests on premises entered by that person or of articles found on any such premises, and take away such samples of water or of any land or articles, as the local authority—

(i) consider appropriate for the purposes of any such power or duty; and

(ii) have authorised that person to carry out or take away,

and the provisions of subsections (3) to (7) of section 38 shall apply to the right of entry given by this subsection to any person designated by a local authority as they apply to the right of entry of an authorised officer of a water authority.

(3) Entry into any premises shall not be demanded as of right by virtue of this section except—

(a) in an emergency, or

(b) at a reasonable time and after 24 hours' notice of the intended entry has been given to the occupier of the premises.

(4) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for restricting the information which may be required under subsection (1) above and for determining the form in which the information is to be so required.

(5) A person who fails without reasonable excuse to comply with the requirements of a notice served on him under subsection (1) above shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.

Standards of wholesomeness

76I.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision that water that is supplied to any premises is or is not to be regarded as wholesome for the purposes of this Part if it satisfies or, as the case may be, fails to satisfy such requirements as may be prescribed.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) above, regulations under this section may, for the purpose of determining the wholesomeness of any water—

(a) prescribe general requirements as to the purposes for which the water is to be suitable;

(b) prescribe specific requirements as to the substances that are to be present in or absent from the water and as to the concentrations of substances which are or are required to be present in the water;

(c) prescribe specific requirements as to other characteristics of the water;

(d) provide that the question whether prescribed requirements are satisfied may be determined by reference to such samples as may be prescribed;

(e) enable the Secretary of State to authorise such relaxations of and departures from the prescribed requirements (or from any of them) as may be prescribed, to make any such authorisation subject to such conditions as may be prescribed and to modify or revoke any such authorisation or condition; and

(f) enable the Secretary of State to authorise a local authority (either instead of the Secretary of State or concurrently with him) to exercise in relation to a private supply any power conferred on the Secretary of State by regulations made by virtue of paragraph (e) above.

Power to give effect to international obligations

76J. The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that the provisions of this Part shall have effect with such modifications as may be prescribed for the purpose of enabling Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to give effect to—

(a) any Community obligations; or

(b) any international agreement to which the United Kingdom is for the time being a party.

Interpretation etc. of Part VIA.

76K.—(1) In this Part—

'analyse', in relation to any sample of land or water, includes subjecting the sample to a test of any description, and cognate expressions shall be construed accordingly;

'local authority' means an islands or district council;

'private supply' means, subject to subsection (2) below, a supply of water provided otherwise than by a water authority (including a supply provided for the purposes of the bottling of water) and cognate expressions shall be construed accordingly;

'substance' includes micro-organisms and any natural or artificial substance or other matter, whether it is in solid or liquid form or in the form of a gas or vapour.;

'wholesome' and cognate expressions shall be construed subject to the provisions of any regulations made under section 76I.

(2) For the purposes of any reference in this Part to a private supply, or to supplying water by means of a private supply, water shall be treated as supplied to any premises not only where it is supplied from outside those premises, but also where it is abstracted, for the purpose of being used or consumed on those premises, from a source which is situated on the premises themselves; and for the purposes of this subsection water shall be treated as used on any premises where it is bottled on those premises for use or consumption elsewhere.

(3) The rights conferred by virtue of this Part as against the owner or occupier of any premises shall be without prejudice to any rights and obligations, as between themselves, of the owner and occupier of the premises in question.'.'.—[*Mr. Moynihan.*]

Amendment made: No. 88—new schedule—

'CONTROL OF POLLUTION IN SCOTLAND

1. The Control of Pollution Act 1974 as it applies to Scotland is amended in accordance with the provisions of this Schedule.

2. In subsection (4) of section 4 (meaning of "land"), for the words "in a stream" there shall be substituted the words "in controlled waters".

3. In subsection (9) of section 11, for the words "relevant waters" there shall be substituted the words "controlled waters".

4. For sections 31 to 42 there shall be substituted the following sections—

General provisions

Waters to which Part II applies

30A.—(1) This part applies to any waters (in this Part referred to as 'controlled waters') of any of the following classes—

(a) relevant territorial waters, that is to say, subject to subsection (5) below, the waters which extend seaward for three miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea adjacent to Scotland is measured;

(b) coastal waters, that is to say, any waters which are within the area which extends landward from those baselines as far as the limit of the highest tide or, in the case of the waters of any relevant river or watercourse, as far as the fresh-water limit of the river or watercourse, together with the waters of any enclosed dock which adjoins waters within that area;

(c) inland waters, that is to say, the waters of any relevant loch or pond or of so much of any relevant river or watercourse as is above the fresh-water limit:

(d) ground waters, that is to say, any waters contained in underground strata, or in—

(i) a well, borehole or similar work sunk into underground strata, including any adit or passage constructed in connection with the well, borehole or work for facilitating the collection of water in the well, borehole or work; or

(ii) any excavation into underground strata where the level of water in the excavation depends wholly or mainly on water entering it from the strata.

(2) The Secretary of State—

(a) shall deposit maps with each river purification authority showing what appear to him to be the fresh-water limits of every relevant river or watercourse in the area of that authority; and

(b) may from time to time, if he considers it appropriate to do so be reason of any change of what appears to him to be the fresh-water limit of any river or watercourse, deposit a map showing a revised limit for that river or watercourse;

and in subsection (1) above 'fresh-water limit', in relation to any river or watercourse, means the place for the time being shown as the fresh-water limit of that river or watercourse in the latest map deposited for that river or watercourse under this subsection.

(3) It shall be the duty of each river purification authority to keep any maps deposited with it under subsection (2) above available, at all reasonable times, for inspection by the public free of charge.

(4) in this section—

'miles' means international nautical miles of 1,852 metres;

'loch or pond' includes a reservoir of any description;

'relevant loch or pond' means (subject to subsection (5) below) any loch or pond which (whether it is natural or artificial or above or below ground) discharges into a relevant river or watercourse or into another loch or pond which is itself a relevant loch or pond;

'relevant river or watercourse' means any river or watercourse (including an underground river or watercourse and an artificial river or watercourse) which is neither a public sewer nor a sewer or drain which drains into a public sewer.

(5) The Secretary of State may by order provide—

(a) that any area of the territorial sea adjacent to Scotland is to be treated as if it were an area of relevant territorial waters for the purposes of this Part;

(b) that any loch or pond which does not discharge into a relevant river or watercourse or into a relevant loch or pond is to be treated for those purposes as a relevant loch or pond.

(6) The power of the Secretary of State to make an order under subsection (5) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament; and such an order may—

(a) contain such supplemental, consequential and transitional provision as the Secretary of State considers appropriate; and

(b) for the purposes of any provision made by virtue of paragraph (a) above, make different provision for different cases, including different provision in relation to different persons, circumstance or localities.

Classification of quality of waters

30B.—(1) The Secretary of State may, in relation to any description of controlled waters (being a description applying to some or all of the waters of a particular class or of two or more different classes), by regulations prescribe a system of classifying the quality of those waters according to criteria specified in the regulations.

(2) The criteria specified in regulations under this section in relation to any classification shall consist of one or more of the following, that is to say—

(a) general requirements as to the purposes for which the waters to which the classification is applied are to be suitable;

(b) specific requirements as to the substances that are to be present in or absent from the water and as to the concentrations of substances which are or are required to be present in the water;

(c) specific requirements as to other characteristics of those waters;

and for the purposes of any such classification regulations under this section may provide that the question whether prescribed requirements are satisfied may be determined by reference to such samples as may be prescribed.

Water quality objectives

30C.—(1) For the purpose of maintaining and improving the quality of controlled waters the Secretary of State may, by serving a notice on a river purification authority specifying—

(a) one or more of the classifications for the time being prescribed under section 30B above; and

(b) in relation to each specified classification, a date,

establish the water quality objectives for any waters within the area of that authority which are, or are included in, waters of a description prescribed for the purposes of that section.

(2) The water quality objectives for any waters to which a notice under this section relates shall be the satisfaction by those waters, on and at all times after each date specified in the notice, of the requirements which at the time of the notice were the requirements for the classification in relation to which that date is so specified.

(3) Where the Secretary of State has established water quality objectives under this section for any waters he may review objectives for those waters if—

(a) five years or more have elapsed since the service of the last notice under subsection (1) or (6) of this section to be served in respect of those waters; or

(b) the river purification authority on which that notice has been served, after consultation with such persons as it considers appropriate, requests a review;

and the Secretary of State shall not exercise his power to establish objectives for any waters by varying the existing objectives for those waters except in consequence of such a review.

(4) Where the Secretary of State proposes to exercise his power under this section to establish or vary the objectives for any waters in the area of a river purification authority he shall—

(a) give notice to that authority setting out his proposal and specifying the period (not being less than three months from the date of publication of the notice) within which representations with respect to the proposal may be made; and

(b) consider any representations which are duly made;

and if he decides, after considering any such representations, to exercise his power to establish or vary those objectives, he may do so either in accordance with the proposal contained in the notice or in accordance with that proposal as modified in such manner as he considers appropriate.

(5) A notice under subsection (4) above shall be given—

(a) by publishing the notice in such manner as the Secretary of State considers appropriate for bringing it to the attention of persons likely to be affected by it; and

(b) by serving a copy of the notice on the authority.

(6) If, on a review under this section or in consequence of any representations made following such a review for the purposes of subsection (4) above, the Secretary of State decides that the water quality objectives for any waters in the area of a river purification authority should remain unchanged, he shall serve notice of that decision on that authority.

General duties to achieve and maintain objectives etc.

30D.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State and of each river purification authority to exercise the powers conferred on him or it by or under the following provisions of this Part or the provisions of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Acts 1951 and 1965 in such manner as ensures, so far as it is practicable by the exercise of those powers to do so, that the water quality objectives specified for any waters in a notice under section 30C above are achieved at all times.

(2) It shall be the duty of each river purification authority, for the purposes of the carrying out of its functions under the following provisions of this Part or the provisions of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Acts 1951 and 1965, to monitor the extent of pollution in controlled waters.

Control of entry of polluting matter and effluents into water

Control of pollution of rivers and coastal waters etc.

31.—(1) Subject to subsections (2) and (3) of this section, a person shall be guilty of an offence if he causes or knowingly permits—

(a) any poisonous, noxious or polluting matter to enter controlled waters; or

(b) any matter to enter any inland waters so as to tend (either directly or in combination with other matter which he or another person causes or permits to enter those waters) to impede the proper flow of the waters in a manner leading or likely to lead to a substantial aggravation of pollution due to other causes or of the consequences of such pollution; or

(c) any solid waste matter to enter controlled waters.

(2) A person shall not be guilty of an offence by virtue of the preceding subsection if—

(a) the entry in question is authorised by, or is a consequence of an act authorised by, a disposal licence or a consent given by the Secretary of State or a river purification authority in pursuance of this Act and the entry or act is in accordance with the conditions, if any, to which the licence or consent is subject; or

(b) the entry in question is authorised by, or is a consequence of an act authorised by—

(i) section 33 of the Water (Scotland) Act 1980 (which among other things relates to

temporary discharges by water authorities in connection with the construction of works) or any prescribed enactment, or

(ii) any provisions of a local Act or statutory order which expressly confers powers to discharge effluent into water, or

(iii) any licence granted under Part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985; or

(c) the entry in question is caused or permitted in an emergency in order to avoid danger to the public and—

(i) he takes all such steps as are reasonably practicable in the circumstances for minimising the extent of the entry in question and of its polluting effects; and

(ii) as soon as reasonably practicable after the entry occurs, particulars of the entry are furnished to the river purification authority in whose area it occurs; or

(d) the matter in question is trade or sewage effluent discharged as mentioned in paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 32 or matter discharged as mentioned in paragraph (b) or (c) of that subsection and the entry in question is not from a vessel;

and a person shall not be guilty of an offence by virtue of the preceding subsection by reason only of his permitting water from an abandoned mine to enter controlled waters.

(3) A person shall not by virtue of paragraph (b) or (c) of subsection (1) of this section be guilty of an offence by reason of his depositing the solid refuse of a mine or quarry on any land so that it falls or is carried into inland waters if—

(a) he deposits the refuse on the land with the consent (which shall not be unreasonably withheld) of the river purification authority in whose area the land is situated; and

(b) no other site for the deposit is reasonably practicable; and

(c) he takes all reasonably practicable steps to prevent the refuse from entering those inland waters.

(4) Where it appears to the Secretary of State that, with a view to preventing poisonous, noxious or polluting matter from entering any controlled waters, it is appropriate to prohibit or restrict the carrying on in a particular area of activities which he considers are likely to result in pollution of the waters, then, subject to subsection (5) below, he may by regulations—

(a) designate that area; and

(b) provide that prescribed activities shall not be carried on at any place within the area except with the consent (which shall not be unreasonably withheld) of the river purification authority in whose area the place is situated and in accordance with any reasonable conditions to which the consent is subject;

(c) provide that a contravention of the regulations shall be an offence and prescribe the maximum penalty for the offence; and

(d) make provision for the imposition by river purification authorities of charges in respect of the consent mentioned in paragraph (b) above.

(5) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State, before he makes any regulations under subsection (4) above—

(a) to publish in the Edinburgh Gazette and in at least one newspaper circulating in the area in question a copy of the proposed regulations and a notice specifying—

(i) a period of not less than twenty-eight days, beginning with the date on which the notice is first published, within which objections to the proposed regulations may be made, and

(ii) the person to whom such objections may be made; and

(b) to consider any objections to the proposed regulations which are made within that period and, if such an objection is so made by a prescribed person and is not withdrawn, to cause a local inquiry to be held in pursuance of section 96 of this Act with respect to the proposed regulations;

and the Secretary of State may, after considering any such objections as are mentioned in paragraph (b) of this subsection and the report of any person appointed to hold a local inquiry with respect to the proposed regulations, make the regulations either in the form in which a copy of them was published in pursuance of this subsection or in that form with such modifications as he considers appropriate.

(6) A river purification authority may by byelaws make such provision as the authority considers appropriate for prohibiting or regulating the washing or cleaning, in any controlled waters in its area, of things of a kind specified in the byelaws; and a person who contravenes any byelaws made by virtue of this subsection shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale or such smaller sum as is specified in the byelaws.

(7) A person guilty of an offence by virtue of subsection (1) of this section shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine or both.

(8) The maximum penalty prescribed in pursuance of subsection (4) of this section shall not exceed the penalties specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) of the preceding subsection.

(9) In subsection (2) of this section—

"disposal licence" has the same meaning as in Part I of this Act;

"local Act" includes enactments in a public general Act which amend a local Act;

"statutory order" means an order, byelaw, scheme or award made under an Act of Parliament, including an order or scheme confirmed by Parliament or brought into operation in accordance with special parliamentary procedure.

Requirements to take precautions against pollution

31A.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision—

(a) for prohibiting a person from having custody or control of any poisonous, noxious or polluting matter unless prescribed works and prescribed precautions and other steps have been carried out or take for the purpose of preventing the matter from entering controlled waters;

(b) for requiring a person who already has custody or control of, or makes use of, any such matter to carry out such works for that purpose as may be prescribed.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of the power conferred by subsection (1) above, regulations under that subsection may—

(a) confer power on the river purification authorities—

(i) to determine for the purposes of the regulations the circumstances in which a person is required to carry out works or take any precautions or other steps; and

(ii) by notice to that person, to impose the requirement and to specify or describe the works, precautions or other steps which that person is required to carry out or take;

(b) provide for appeals to the Secretary of State against notices served by a river purification authority in pursuace of provision made by virtue of paragraph (a) above; and

(c) provide that a contravention of the regulations shall be an offence the penalty for which shall be—

(i) on summary conviction, imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or to both.

(ii) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or to a fine or to both.

Control of discharge of trade and sewage effluent etc. into rivers and coastal waters etc.

32.—(1) Subject to subsections (3) to (5) of this section, a person shall be guilty of an offence if he causes or knowingly permits—

(a) any trade effluent or sewage effluent to be discharged—

(i) into any controlled waters, or
(ii) from land in Scotland through a pipe into the sea out-side the seaward limits of controlled waters, or
(iii) from a building or from plant on to or into any land or into any waters of a loch or pond which are not

inland waters;

or

(b) any matter other than trade or sewage effluent to be discharged into controlled waters from a sewer as defined by section 59(1) of the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968 or from a drain as so defined; or
(c) any matter other than trade or sewage effluent to be discharged into controlled waters from a drain which a roads authority is obliged or entitled to keep open by virtue of section 51 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, and in respect of which the river purification authority in whose area the discharge occurs has, not later than the beginning of the period of three months ending with the date of the discharge, served on the roads authority a notice stating that this paragraph is to apply to the drain,

unless the discharge is made with the consent in pursuance of section 34 of this Act of the river purification authority in whose area the discharge occurs (or, in a case falling within paragraph (a)(ii) of this subsection, of the river purification authority whose area includes the point at which the pipe passes or first passes into or under controlled waters from the sea outside them) and is in accordance with the conditions, if any, to which the consent is subject.

(2) Where any sewage effluent is discharged as mentioned in paragraph (a) of the preceding subsection from any works or sewer vested in a local authority and the authority did not cause or knowingly permit the discharge but was bound to receive into the works or sewer, either unconditionally or subject to conditions which were observed, matter included in the discharge, the authority shall be deemed for the purposes of that subsection to have caused the discharge.

(3) The Secretary of State may—

(a) by an order made before subsection (1) of this section comes into force provide that that subsection shall not, while the order is in force, apply to discharges which are of a kind or in an area specified in the order and for which, if this Act had not been passed, consent in pursuance of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Acts 1951 and 1965 would not have been required;
(b) by order vary or revoke any order in force by virtue of the preceding paragraph;

and an order made by virtue of this subsection may require any river purification authority specified in the order to publish in a manner so specified such information about the order as is so specified.

(4) Subsection (1) of this section shall not apply to any discharge which—

(a) is from a vessel; or
(b) is authorised by a licence granted under Part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985,

and a person shall not be guilty of an offence under subsection (1) if—

(i) the discharge is caused or permitted in an emergency in order to avoid danger to the public;
(ii) he takes all such steps as are reasonably practicable in the circumstances for minimising the extent of the discharge and of its polluting effects; and
(iii) as soon as reasonably practicable after the discharge occurs, particulars of the discharge are furnished to the river purification authority in whose area it occurs.

(5) A local authority shall not be guilty of an offence by virtue of subsection (1) of this section by reason only of the fact that a discharge from a sewer or works vested in the authority contravenes conditions of a consent relating to the discharge if—

(a) the contravention is attributable to a discharge which another person caused or permitted to be made into the sewer or works; and
(b) the authority either was not bound to receive the discharge into the sewer or works or was bound to receive it there subject to conditions but the conditions were not observed; and
(c) the authority could not reasonably have been expected to prevent the discharge into the sewer or works;

and a person shall not be guilty of such an offence in consequence of a discharge which he caused or permitted to be made into a sewer or works vested in local authority if the authority was bound to receive the discharge there either unconditionally or subject to conditions which were observed.

(6) In subsection (2) of this section and the preceding subsection, "local authority" means a local authority within the meaning of the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968.

(7) A person who is guilty of an offence by virtue of subsection (1) of this section shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or both;
(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years or a fine or both.

Control of sanitary appliances in vessels.

33.—(1) A river purification authority may by byelaws make such provision as the authority, considers appropriate for prohibiting or regulating the keeping or use, on any controlled waters in the area of the authority, of vessels of a kind specified in the byelaws which are provided with sanitary appliances; and a person who contravenes any byelaw made by virtue of this section shall be guilty of an offence.

(2) The Secretary of State may by order provide that any byelaws specified in the order which were made by virtue of section 25(1)(c) of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951 (byelaws) shall have effect, with such modifications (if any) as are so specified, as if made by virtue of the preceding subsection.

(3) In this section "sanitary appliance" means a water closet or other prescribed appliance (except a sink, bath and a shower-bath) which is designed to permit polluting matter to pass into the water on which the vessel in question is for the time being situated.

(4) A person guilty of an offence by virtue of any of the preceding provisions of this section shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine of an amount not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale or such smaller sum as may be specified in the byelaws.

CONSENTS FOR DISCHARGES

Consents for discharges of trade and sewage effluent etc.

34.—(1) An application to a river purification authority for consent in pursuance of this section for discharges of any effluent or other matter shall be accompanied or supplemented by all such information as the authority may reasonably require; and the authority may if it thinks fit treat an application for consent for discharges at two or more places as separate applications for consent for discharges at each of those places.

(2) Subject to the following section, it shall be the duty of a river purification authority to which an application for consent is made in pursuance of this section—

(a) to give the consent either unconditionally or subject to conditions or to refuse it; and
(b) not to withhold the consent unreasonably;

and if within the period of three months beginning with the date when an application for consent is received by the authority, or within such longer period as may at any time be agreed upon in writing between the authority and the applicant, the authority has neither given nor refused the consent nor informed the applicant that the application has been transmitted to the Secretary of State in pursuance of the following section, the authority shall be deemed to have refused the consent.

(3) If it appears to the authority that a person has, without the authority's consent, caused or permitted matter to be discharged in its area in contravention of section 32(1) of this Act and that a similar contravention by that person is likely, the authority may if it thinks fit serve on him an instrument in writing giving its consent, subject to conditions specified in the instrument, for discharges of a kind so specified; but

consent given in pursuance of this subsection shall not relate to any discharge which occurred before the instrument giving the consent was served on the recipient of the instrument.

(4) The conditions subject to which the authority may give its consent in pursuance of this section shall be such reasonable conditions as the authority thinks fit; and without prejudice to the generality of the preceding provisions of this subsection those conditions my include reasonable conditions—

(a) as to the places at which the discharges to which the consent relates may be made and as to the design and construction of any outlets for the discharges;

(b) as to the nature, origin, composition, temperature, volume and rate of the discharges and as to the period during which the discharges may be made;

(c) as to the provision of facilities for taking samples of the matter discharged and in particular as to the provision, maintenance and use of manholes, inspection chambers, observation wells and bore-holes in connection with the discharges;

(d) as to the provision, maintenance and testing of meters for measuring the volume and rate of the discharges and apparatus for determining the nature, composition and temperature of the discharges;

(e) as to the keeping of records of the nature, origin, composition, temperature, volume and rate of the discharges and in particular of records of readings of meters and other recording apparatus provided in accordance with any other condition attached to the consent;

(f) as to the making of returns and the giving of other information to the authority about the nature, origin, composition, temperature, volume and rate of the discharges; and

(g) as to the steps to be taken, in relation to the discharges or by way of subjecting any substance likely to affect the description of matter discharged to treatment or any other process, for minimising the polluting effects of the discharges on any controlled waters;

and it is hereby declared that consent may be given in pursuance of this section subject to different conditions in respect of different periods.

(5) A person who, in an application for consent in pursuance of this section, makes any statement which he knows to be false in a material particular or recklessly makes any statement which is false in a material particular shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or on conviction on indictment to a fine.

Reference to Secretary of State of certain applications for consent

35.—(1) The Secretary of State may, either in consequence of representations made to him or otherwise, direct a river purification authority to transmit to him for determination applications for consent in pursuance of the preceding section which are specified in the direction or are of a kind so specified, and it shall be the duty of the authority to comply with the direction and to inform each relevant applicant that his application has been transmitted to the Secretary of State.

(2) Before determining an application transmitted to him by a river purification authority in pursuance of this section the Secretary of State may if he thinks fit, and shall if a request to be heard with respect to the application is made to him in accordance with regulations by the applicant or the authority, cause a local inquiry to be held in pursuance of section 96 of this Act into the application or afford to the applicant and the authority an opportunity of appearing before and being heard by a person appointed by the Secretary of State for the purpose.

(3) Where in pursuance of the preceding subsection the Secretary of State affords to an applicant and a river purification authority an opportunity of appearing before and being heard by a person with respect to the application in question, it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to afford an opportunity of appearing before and being heard by that person to any person who, in pursuance of subsection (1)(c) or (5) of the following section, has made representations relating to the application.

(4) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to determine an application transmitted to him by a river purification authority in pursuance of this section by directing the authority to refuse its consent in pursuance of the preceding section in consequence of the application or to give the consent either unconditionally or subject to such conditions as are specified in the direction, and it shall be the duty of the authority to comply with the direction.

Provisions supplementary to ss. 34 and 35

36.—(1) Where a river purification authority receives an application for consent in pursuance of section 34 of this Act or serves an instrument in pursuance of subsection (3) of that section, it shall be the duty of the authority, before deciding whether to give or refuse consent in pursuance of the application or, as the case may be, after serving the instrument—

(a) to publish in the prescribed form notice of the application or instrument in two successive weeks in a newspaper or newspapers circulating in—

(i) the area or areas in which the places are situated at which it is proposed in the application that the discharges should be made or, as the case may be, at which discharges are the subject of consent given by the instrument, and

(ii) the area or areas appearing to the authority to be in the vicinity of any controlled waters which the authority considers likely to be affected by the discharges,

and, not earlier than the day following that on which the first publication of the notice is completed in all relevant areas in pursuance of the preceding provisions of this paragraph, to publish such a notice in the Edinburgh Gazette;

(b) to send copies of the application or instrument to each local authority in whose area it is proposed in application that a discharge should be made or in whose area a discharge is the subject of consent given by the instrument and, in the case of an application or instrument relating to coastal waters, relevant territorial waters or an application relating to waters outside the seaward limits of relevant territorial waters, to the Secretary of State; and

(c) to consider any written representations relating to the application or instrument which are made to the authority by any person within the period of six weeks beginning with the date on which the notice of the application or instrument is published in the Edinburgh Gazette.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1) above, "local authority" means a regional or district council, and any place at sea at which it is proposed in an application that a discharge should be made shall be treated as situated at the point on land nearest to that place.

(3) Where notice of an application is published by a river purification authority in pursuance of subsection (1)(a) of this section, the authority shall be entitled to recover the cost of publication from the applicant.

(4) A river purification authority shall be entitled to disregard the provisions of subsection (1) of this section in relation to an application (except so much of paragraph (b) of that subsection as requires copies of the application to be sent to the Secretary of State) if the authority proposes to give consent in pursuance of the application and considers that the discharges in question will have no appreciable effect on the water into which they are proposed to be made.

(5) The preceding provisions of this section shall have effect with prescribed modifications in relation to an application which is the subject of a direction in pursuance of subsection (1) of the preceding section.

(6) Where a river purification authority proposes to give consent in pursuance of section 34 of this Act in consequence of an application in respect of which representations have been made in pursuance of subsection (1)(c) of this section then—

(a) it shall be the duty of the authority to serve notice of the proposal on the person who made the representations and to include in the notice a statement of the effect of the following paragraph; and

(b) that person may, within the period of twenty-one days beginning with the day on which the notice of the proposal is served on him, request the Secretary of State in accordance with regulations to give a direction in pursuance of subsection (1) of the preceding section in respect of the application; and

(c) it shall be the duty of the authority not to give consent in consequence of the application before the expiration of that period and, if within that period the said person makes a request in pursuance of the preceding paragraph and serves notice of the request on the authority, not to give consent in pursuance of the application unless the Secretary of State has given notice to the authority that he declines to comply with the request;

and in calculating in the case of any application the period of three months mentioned in section 34(2) of this Act or a longer period there mentioned there shall be disregarded any period during which the authority to which the application was made is prohibited by virtue of paragraph (c) of this subsection from giving consent in consequence of the application.

(7) A consent for any discharges which is given in pursuance of section 34 of this Act is not limited to discharges by a particular person and accordingly extends to the discharges in question which are made by any person.

Revocation of consents and alteration and imposition of conditions.

37.—(1) It shall be the duty of a river purification authority by which a consent is given in pursuance of section 34 of this Act to review from time to time the consent and the conditions, if any, to which the consent is subject; and subject to the following section the authority may, by a notice served on the person making a discharge in pursuence of the consent, revoke the consent if it is reasonable to do so or make reasonable modifications of the said conditions or, in the case of an unconditional consent, provide that it shall be subject to reasonable conditions specified in the notice.

(2) Subject to the following section, the Secretary of State may—

(a) for the purpose of enabling Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to give effect to any Community obligation or to any international agreement to which the United Kingdom is for the time being a party;

(b) for the protection of public health or of flora and fauna dependent on an aquatic environment; or

(c) in consequence of any representations made to him or otherwise,

direct a river purification authority to serve a notice in pursuance of the preceding subsection containing such provisions as are specified in the direction and it shall be the duty of the authority to comply with the direction; and if the authority fails to serve the notice within such period as the Secretary of State may allow he may serve the notice on behalf of the authority, and it is hereby declared that for the purposes of this Part of the Act a notice served on behalf of an authority by virtue of this subsection is served by the authority.

Restriction on variation and revocation of consent and of previous variation

38.—(1) Each instrument signifying the consent of a river purification authority in pursuance of section 34 of this Act shall specify a period during which no notice in pursuance of subsection (1) or (2)(c) of the preceding section is to be served in respect of the consent without the written agreement of a person making a discharge in pursuance of the consent; and the said period shall be a reasonable period of not less than two years beginning with the day on which the consent takes effect.

(2) Each notice served by a river purification authority in pursuance of subsection (1) or (2)(c) of the preceding section (except a notice which only revokes a consent or conditions) shall specify a period during which a subsequent notice in pursuance of that subsection which alters the effect of the first-mentioned notice is not to be served without the written agreement of a person making a discharge in pursuance of the consent to which the first-mentioned notice relates; and the said period shall be a reasonable period of not less than two years beginning with the day on which the first-mentioned notice is served.

(3) The authority shall be liable to pay compensation to any person in respect of any loss or damage sustained by that person as a result of the authority's compliance with a direction given in relation to any consent by virtue of section 37(2)(b) of this Act if—

(a) in complying with that direction the authority does anything which, apart from that direction, it would be precluded from doing by a restriction imposed under subsection (1) or (2) above; and

(b) the direction is not shown to have been in consequence of—

(i) a change of circumstances which could not reasonably have been foreseen at the beginning of the period to which the restriction relates; or

(ii) consideration by the Secretary of State of material information which was not reasonably available to the authority at the beginning of that period;

and in this paragraph information is material, in relation to a consent, if it relates to any discharge made or to be made by virtue of the consent, to the interaction of any such discharge with any other discharge or to the combined effect of the matter discharged and any other matter.

(4) A restriction imposed under subsection (1) or (2) of this section shall not prevent the service by the authority of a notice by virtue of section 37(1) or (2)(c) of this Act in respect of a consent given under section 34(3) of this Act if—

(a) the notice is served not more than three months after the beginning of the period specified in section 36(1)(c) of this Act for the making of representations with respect to the consent; and

(b) the authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State considers, in consequence of any representations received by it or him within that period, that it is appropriate for the notice to be served.

39.—(1) Any questions as to whether—

(a) a river purification authority has unreasonably withheld its consent in pursuance of section 31(3) or 34 of this Act or regulations made by virtue of section 31(4) of this Act or has given its consent in pursuance of the said section 34 or such regulations subject to conditions which are unreasonable; or

(b) a notice served in pursuance of section 37(1) of this Act contains terms (other than a term required by subsection (2) of the preceding section) which are unreasonable; or

(c) the period specified in any instrument or notice in pursuance of subsection (1) or (2) of the preceding section is unreasonable,

shall be determined for the purposes of this Part of this Act by the Secretary of State: but no question relating to a determination of the Secretary of State in pursuance of section 35(4) of this Act shall be referred to him in pursuance of this subsection and any such determination shall be final.

(2) Provision may be made by regulations as to the manner in which and the time within which a question may be referred or a request may be made in pursuance of the preceding provisions of this section and as to the procedure for dealing with such a reference or request.

(3) In any case where—

(a) a question as to whether a river purification authority has unreasonably withheld its consent in pursance of section 34 of this Act, or has given its consent in pursuance of that section subject to conditions which are unreasonable, is referred to the Secretary of State in pursuance of this section; and

(b) representations relating to the application for the consent in question were made to the authority in pursuance of section 36(1)(c) of this Act,

it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State, before he determines the question, to secure that the authority has served notice of the reference on the persons who made the representations and to take account of any further written representations relating to the application which are received by him from those persons within a prescribed period.

(4) Where a question is referred to the Secretary of State in pursuance of subsection (1) of this section and he determines that the consent in question was unreasonably withheld or that the conditions or terms or period in question are or is unreasonable, he shall give to the relevant river purification authority such a direction as he thinks fit with regard to the consent, conditions, terms or period and it shall be the duty of the authority to comply with the direction.

(5) the withholding by a river purification authority of such a consent as it is mentioned in subsection (1) of this section, the conditions subject to which such a consent is given and such terms and period as are so mentioned shall be treated as reasonable for the purposes of this Part of this Act until the contrary is determined in pursuance of subsection (1) of this section except that where a question as to the reasonableness of the conditions of a consent given in pursuance of regulations made by virtue of section 31(4) of this Act is referred to the Secretary of State in pursuance of this section the consent shall be treated for those purposes as unconditional while the reference is pending.

(6) At any stage of the proceedings on a reference to the Secretary of State in pursuance of this section he may, and shall if so directed by the Court of Session, state in the form of a special case for the decision of the court any question of law arising in those proceedings.

Transitional provisions relating to consents

40.—(1) Regulations may provide—

(a) for any consent for discharges which was given in pursuance of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Acts 1951 and 1965 to have effect for any of the purposes of this Part of this Act as if given in pursuance of prescribed provisions of section 34 of this Act; and

(b) for any conditions to which such a consent was subject in pursuance of any of those enactments to have effect for any of those purposes as if attached to the consent in pursuance of prescribed provisions of this Part of this Act.

(2) Regulations may provide for the terms of a consent for an outlet which was given in pursuance of the rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951 and for conditions to which such a consent was subject in pursuance of that Act or which were imposed with respect to the outlet in pursuance of section 28(4) of that Act—

(a) to have effect, with or without modifications, for any of the purposes of this Part of this Act as if the terms or conditions were conditions attached to a consent given in pursuance of section 34 of this Act for discharges from the outlet; or

(b) to be treated, with or without modifications, for any of those purposes in such other manner as may be prescribed.

(3) An application for such a consent as is mentioned in subsection (1) of this section which is pending immediately before the relevant day shall be treated on and after that day as an application for consent in pursuance of section 34 of this Act which was made on the day on which it was actually made.

(4) Where an application for consent in pursuance of section 34 of this Act in respect of any discharge is duly made to a river purification authority before the relevant day and the discharge in question is not such as is mentioned in section 32(3)(a) of this Act and is substantially a continuation of a previous discharge which during the year ending with the 30th April 1974 was lawfully made without such consent as is so mentioned (any reduction of the temperature, volume or rate of the discharge as compared with that of the previous discharge being disregarded), the authority shall be deemed to have given unconditionally the consent applied for—

(a) until the authority actually gives the consent unconditionally; or

(b) if the authority decides to refuse consent or to give it subject to conditions, until the expiration of the period of three months beginning with the date when the authority serves on the applicant notice of the decision; or

(c) if during that period the applicant appeals to the Secretary of State against the decision in pursuance of the preceding section, until the determination of the appeal.

(5) Regulations may provide for any appeal which immediately before the relevant day is pending in pursuance of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Acts 1951 and 1965 to be treated on and after that day as an appeal in pursuance of prescribed provisions of this Part of the Act.

(6) In this section "the relevant day" means the day when section 32(1) of this Act comes into force.

Ancillary provisions relating to control of discharges

Registers

41.—(1) It shall be the duty of river purification authorities to maintain in accordance with regulations, registers containing prescribed particulars of—

(a) any notices of water quality objectives or other notices served under section 30C above;

(b) applications for consents—

(i) made to the authorities in pursuance of this part of this Act;

(ii) sent to the Secretary of State in pursuance of section 34 of this Act (as modified by regulations made under section 55 of this Act);

(c) consents given in pursuance of any provision of this Part of this Act (except section 40(4)) and the conditions to which the consents are subject;

(d) samples—

(i) of effluent taken by the authorities in pursuance of section 19 of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951;

(ii) of effluent taken by islands councils from discharges made by them in their own areas for the purposes of their functions relating to the pollution of controlled waters; and

(iii) of water taken by the authorities;

and information produced by analyses of the samples and the steps taken in consequence of the information;

(e) certificates issued in pursuance of the following section.

(2) It shall be the duty of a river purification authority—

(a) to secure that registers maintained by the authority in pursuance of the preceding subsection are, after such date as is prescribed with respect to the registers, open to inspection by the public free of charge at all reasonable hours; and

(b) to afford members of the public reasonable facilities for obtaining from the authority, on payment of reasonable charges, copies of entries in the register.

Power of Secretary of State to exempt applications, consents and conditions etc. from publicity.

42.—(1) If a person who proposes to make or has made an application to a river purification authority for any consent in pursuance of section 34 of this Act (hereafter in this subjection refered to as "the relevant application")—

(a) applies to the Secretary of State within a prescribed period for a certificate providing that section 36(1) of this Act and paragraphs (b) to (d) of subsection (1) of the preceding section shall not apply to the relevant application or to any consent given or conditions imposed in consequence of the relevant application or to any sample of effluent taken from a discharge for which consent is given in consequence of the relevant application or to information produced by analysis of such a sample; and

(b) satisfies the Secretary of State that it would—

(i) prejudice to an unreasonable degree some private interest by disclosing information about a trade secret, or

(ii) be contrary to the public interest,

if a certificate were not issued in pursuance of his application to the Secretary of State.

the Secretary of State may issue a certificate to that person providing that section 36(1) of this Act and those paragraphs shall not apply to such of the things mentioned in paragraph (a) of this subsection as are specified in the certificate.

(2) If a person who is making or propose to make a discharge which is the subject of a consent given in pursuance of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Acts 1951 and 1965—

(a) applies to the Secretary of State for a certificate providing section shall not apply to the consent or any conditions to which the consent is subject or any sample of effluent taken from a discharge to which the consent relates or any information produced by analysis of such a sample; and

(b) satisfied the Secretary of State as mentioned in paragraph (c) of the preceding subsection,

the Secretary of State may issue a certificate to that person providing that the said subsection (1)(c) or (d) shall not apply to such of the things mentioned in paragraph (a) of this subsection as are specified in the certificate.".

5. For sections 46 to 51 there shall be substituted the following sections—

"*Operations by water authorities to remedy or forestall pollution of water.*

46.—(1) Where it appears to a river purification authority that any poisonous, noxious or polluting matter or any solid waste matter is likely to enter, or is or was present in, any controlled waters in its area, the authority may carry out in its area or elsewhere such operations as it considers appropriate—

(a) in a case where the matter appears likely to enter such waters, for the purpose of preventing it from doing so; and

(b) in a case where the matter appears to be or to have been present in such waters, for the purpose of removing or disposing of the matter or of remedying or mitigating any pollution caused by its presence in the waters or of restoring the waters (including the fauna and flora dependent on the aquatic environment of the waters), so far as it is reasonably practicable to do so, to the state in which they were immediately before the matter became present in the waters;

but nothing in this subsection empowers a river purification authority to impede or prevent the making of any discharge in pursuance of a consent given by any authority by virtue of section 34 of this Act.

(2) Where a river purification authority carries out any operations in pursuance of this section the authority shall, subject to the following subsection, be entitled to recover the costs of doing so from any persons who caused or knowingly permitted the matter in question to be present at the place from which it was likely in the opinion of the authority to enter the controlled waters or, as the case may be, to be present in the controlled waters.

(3) No such costs shall be payable by a person—

(a) in so far as he satisfies the court in which it is sought to recover the costs that the costs were incurred unnecessarily; or

(b) for any operations in respect of water from an abandoned mine which that person permitted to reach such a place as is mentioned in the preceding subsection or to enter the controlled waters.

(4) In determining the damage which a person has suffered in consequence of pollution in respect of which operations have been or may be carried out in pursuance of this section, account shall be taken of the extent to which it is shown that the damage has been reduced by operations in pursuance of this section and of the extent to which it is shown that the damage is likely to be so reduced.

Duty of authorities to deal with waste from vessels etc.

47.—(1) It shall be the duty of each river purification authority—

(a) to arrange for the collection and disposal of waste from vessels in its area which appears to the authority to need collection in consequence of section 33 of this Act; and

(b) to arrange for the provision of facilities for the washing out of prescribed appliances from vessels in its area.

(2) A river purification authority may arrange for the provision of facilities by way of water closets, urinals and wash basins for the use of persons from vessels in the authority's area.

(3) A port local authority constituted under Part X of the Public Health (Scotland) Act 1897 shall have power to make arrangements with a river purification authority for the purposes of any of the preceding provisions of this section.

Power of river purification authorities to exclude unregistered vessels from rivers etc.

48.—(1) Where it appears to a river purification authority to be appropriate to do so for the purpose of preventing the pollution of inland waters in its area, the authority may make byelaws providing that vessels shall not be on any such waters which are specified in the byelaws unless the vessels are registered by the authority in accordance with the byelaws or are exempted by the byelaws from registration; and a person who causes or knowingly permits a vessel to be on inland waters in contravention of byelaws made by virtue of this subsection shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or such smaller sum as may be specified in the byelaws.

(2) Byelaws made by a river purification authority in pursuance of the preceding subsection may authorise the authority to make reasonable charges in respect of the registration of vessels in pursuance of the byelaws; and no charges shall be payable, by persons in or from vessels registered by the authority in pursuance of the byelaws, in respect of the use by those persons of facilities provided in pursuance of the preceding section by or by arrangement with the authority.

Deposits and vegetation in rivers etc.

49.—(1) If without the consent of the relevant river purification authority, which shall not be unreasonably withheld,—

(a) a person removes from any part of the bottom, channel or bed of any inland waters a deposit accumulated by reason of any dam, weir or sluice holding back the waters and does so by causing the deposit to be carried away in suspension in the waters; or

(b) any substantial amount of vegetation cut or uprooted in any inland waters, or so near to any such waters that it falls into it, is allowed to remain in the waters by the wilful default of any person,

then, subject to the following subsection, that person shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.

(2) Nothing in paragraph (a) of the preceding subsection applies to anything done in the exercise of statutory powers conferred by or under any enactment relating to land drainage, flood prevention or navigation.

(3) Regulations may provide that any reference to inland waters in subsection (1) of this section shall be construed as including a reference to such coastal waters as are prescribed for the purposes of that subsection.

(4) Any question as to whether the consent of a river purification authority in pursuance of subsection (1) of this section is unreasonably withheld shall be determined by the Secretary of State; and any consent given in pursuance of section 24 of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951 (which is superseded by this section) shall be treated for the purposes of this section as given in pursuance of this section.

Investigation of water pollution problems arising from closure of mines

50. Each river purification authority shall have power to carry out studies for the purposes of ascertaining—

(a) what problems relating to the pollution of controlled waters may arise or have arisen in consequence of the abandonment of any mine in its area or might arise if any such mine were abandoned; and

(b) what steps are likely to be appropriate for the purpose of dealing with the problems and what the cost of taking those steps would be.

Codes of good agricultural practice

51.—(1) The Secretary of State may by order made by statutory instrument approve any code of practice issued (whether by him or by another person) for the purpose of—

(a) giving practical guidance to persons engaged in agriculture with respect to activities that may affect controlled waters; and

(b) promoting what appear to him to be desirable practices by such persons for avoiding or minimising the pollution of any such waters,

and may at any time by such an order approve a modification of such a code or withdraw his approval of such a code or modification.

(2) A contravention of a code of practice for the time being approved under this section shall not of itself give rise to any criminal or civil liability, but a river purification authority shall take into account whether there has been or is likely to be any such contravention in determining when and how it should exercise any powers conferred on it by regulations under section 31A of this Act.

(3) The Secretary of State shall not make an order under this section unless he has first consulted the river purification authorities.".

6. For sections 53 to 56 there shall be substituted the following sections—

"*Charges in respect of certain discharges*

53.—(1) Where—

(a) an application is made to a river purification authority for a consent for the purposes of sections 31(3), 32 or 49 of this Act of for the modification of, or of the conditions of, any such consent;

(b) the authority gives a consent under section 34(3) of this Act or a consent for the purposes of section 31(3) or 49 of this Act; or

(c) a consent for the purposes of sections 31(3), 32 or 49 of this Act is for the time being in force,

the authority may require the payment to it of such charges as may be specified in or determined under a scheme made by it under this section.

(2) The persons who shall be liable to pay charges which are required to be paid by virtue of a scheme under this section shall be—

(a) in the case of a charge by virtue of subsection (1)(a) above, the person who makes the application;

(b) in the case of a charge by virtue of subsection (1)(b) above, any person who is authorised to do anything by virtue of the consent and on whom the instrument giving the consent is served, and

(c) in the case of a charge by virtue of subsection (1)(c) above, any person who makes a discharge in pursuance of the consent at any time during the period to which, in accordance with the scheme, the charge relates;

and provision made by a scheme for the purposes of paragraph (c) above may impose a single charge in respect of the whole period for which the consent is in force or separate charges in respect of different parts of that period or both such a single charge and such separate chages.

(3) An authority shall not make a scheme under this section unless its provisions have been approved by the Secretary of State; and the consent of the Treasury shall be required for the giving of such an approval.

(4) Before submitting a scheme under this section to the Secretary of State for his approval an authority shall, in such manner as it considers appropriate for bringing it to the attention of persons likely to be affected by it, publish a notice setting out its proposals and specifying the period within which representations with respect to the proposals may be made to the Secretary of State.

(5) Where any proposed scheme has been submitted to the Secretary of State for his approval, it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State, in determining whether or not to approve the scheme or to approve it subject to modifications—

(a) to consider any representations duly made to him; and

(b) to have regard to the matters specified in subsection (6) below.

(6) The matters mentioned in subsection (5)(b) above are—

(a) the need to ensure that the amount recovered by the authority by way of charges fixed by or under schemes under this section does not exceed, taking one year with another, such amount as appears to the Secretary of State to be reasonably attributable to the expenses incurred by the authority in carrying out its functions under sections 34 to 38 and 49 of this Act and otherwise in relation to discharges into controlled waters; and

(b) the need to ensure that no undue preference is shown, and that there is no undue discrimination, in the fixing of charges by or under the scheme.

(7) A scheme under this section may—

(a) make provision with respect to the times and methods of payment of the charges which are required to be paid by virtue of the scheme;

(b) make different provision for different cases, including different provision in relation to different persons, circumstances or localities; and

(c) contain supplemental, consequential and transitional provision for the purposes of the scheme;

and such a scheme may revoke or amend a previous scheme under this section.

(8) It shall be the duty of a river purification authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for bringing the provisions of any scheme under this section which is for the time being in force to the attention of persons likely to be affected by them.

Directions to the river purification authority

54.—(1) Directions of a general or specific character may be given to each river purification authority by the Secretary of State with respect to the carrying out of its functions and it shall be the duty of each river purification authority to comply with any such direction.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of the power conferred by subsection (1) of this section, directions under that subsection may include such directions as the Secretary of State considers appropriate in order to enable Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to give effect to—

(a) any Community obligations; or

(b) any international agreement to which the United Kingdom is for the time being a party.

(3) Any power of the Secretary of State otherwise than by virtue of this section to give direction to a river purification authority shall be without prejudice to the power conferred by this section.

Supplemental

Discharges by islands councils

55.—(1) This part of this Act shall have effect with prescribed modifications in relation to discharges by an islands council in its area.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of the powers to make regulation conferred by the preceding subsection, any regulations made in pursuance of that subsection may provide for consents required by islands councils for the purposes of this Part of this Act as modified by virtue of that subsection to be or be deemed to be given by the Secretary of State.

Interpretation etc. of Part II

56.—Except where the context otherwise requires, in this Part of this Act—

"agriculture" and "agricultural" have the same meanings as in the Agriculture (Scotland) Act 1948;

"coastal waters", "controlled waters", "ground waters", "inland waters" and "relevant territorial waters" have the meanings given by section 30A(1) above;

"effluent" means any liquid, including particles of matter and other substances in suspension in the liquid;

"sewage effluent" includes any effluent from the sewage disposal or sewerage works of a local authority within the meaning of the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968;

"trade effluent" includes any effluent which is discharged from premises used for carrying on any trade or industry, other than surface water and domestic sewage;

"underground strata" means strata subjacent to the surface of any land;

"water authority" means an authority established in accordance with section 3 of the Water (Scotland) Act 1980;

"watercourse" includes all rivers, streams, ditches, drains, cuts, culverts, dykes, sluices, sewers, and passages through which water flows except mains and other pipes which belong to the water authority or are used by a water authority or any other person for the purposes only of providing a supply of water to any premises.

(2) In this Part of this Act—

(a) any reference to the waters of any loch or pond or of any river or watercourse includes a reference to the bottom, channel or bed of any loch, pond, river or, as the case may be, watercourse which is for the time being dry; and

(b) any reference to water contained in underground strata is a reference to water so contained otherwise than in a sewer, pipe, reservoir, tank or other underground works constructed in any such strata.

(3) For the purposes of the definition of "trade effluent" in subsection (1) above any premises (whether on land or not) wholly or mainly used (whether for profit or not) for agricultural purposes or for the purposes of fish farming or for scientific research or experiment shall be deemed to be premises used for carrying on a trade.

(4) For the purposes of this Part of this Act the area of a river purification authority shall include all controlled waters off the coast of the area which is the authority's area apart from this subsection; and any question as to whether any place is included in the area of a river purification authority by virtue of this subsection shall be determined by the Secretary of State.

(5) For the purposes of this Part of this Act a notice imposing conditions with respect to discharges which was given by a river purification authority in pursuance of—

(a) section 28(4) of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1951; or

(b) section 1(5) of the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) (Scotland) Act 1965,

shall be treated as having given the authority's consent in pursuance of the Act in question for those discharges subject to those conditions.

(6) Section 30(5) of this Act shall have effect in relation to this Part of this Act as if for any reference to Part I of this Act there were substituted a reference to this Part of this Act.

7. In subsection (1) of section 104 (orders and regulation), for the words "section 33(4), 44(5), 52, 53 or 109(2)" there shall be substituted the words "sections 44(5) and 109(2).". —*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Schedule 1

The National Rivers Authority

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move amendment No. 55, in page 186, line 23, after '(1)' insert

'The Authority shall be entitled to borrow in accordance with the following provisions of this paragraph but not otherwise.

(1A) Subject to sub-paragraph (1C) below'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 56.

Mr. Moynihan: The amendments set out the circumstances in which it is proposed that the National Rivers Authority will be able to undertake borrowing in relation to its functions. Amendment No. 55 provides that the amount borrowed by the NRA under its temporary borrowing powers, for which paragraph 18 of the schedule already provides, will be subject to the authority's overall borrowing requirement. Amendment No. 56, which is the more significant of the amendments, would give the NRA the ability to undertake long-term borrowing to finance its flood defence functions in certain defined circumstances. It describes the mechanism by which loans would be made to the NRA for that purpose and sets out borrowing limits which would apply.

During discussion in Committee of the NRA's finances concern was expressed on both sides about the fact that the Bill did not provide for the NRA to have long-term borrowing powers in relation to flood defence work. In particular, concern was expressed in Committee about the funding arrangements for flood defence emergencies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said:

"Emergencies may arise which occasion emergency action and it is extremely difficult to budget or save for that in advance." [*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 17 January 1989; c. 258.]

We have given careful consideration to the arguments that were put in Committee by my hon. Friends and, indeed, to representations received from those concerned with flood defence arrangements and to the views of the Opposition. While we remain firmly of the view, for reasons that I explained at length in Committee, that it is not necessary for the NRA to have long-term borrowing powers to deal with the normal run of flood defence work, we accept the argument that there are some circumstances in which it would be right for the NRA to have such powers.

Accordingly, amendment No. 56 provides the NRA with borrowing powers for use when it is faced with heavy expenditure for which it had been impossible to plan. We therefore do not expect that they will need to be used very often. Long-term borrowing under these powers would require the consent, as appropriate, of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, together with the approval of the Treasury. We intend that the use of these powers shall be limited to circumstances in which works are urgently needed to avoid the risk of serious flooding, and the flood defence committee cannot defer other planned work to provide the necessary finance.

Mr. Pike: This is an important amendment and, as the Minister said, the subject evoked much concern in Committee. Can he tell us how the £160 million limit was arrived at and what would happen if at some subsequent date the figure proved insufficient? Could it then be changed?

Mr. Moynihan: It is a figure which, after detailed consideration with the water authorities, we felt was a wise, indeed generous, one to cover such unexpected expenditure. There is no doubt that in the event of an appalling tragedy that required substantial expenditure we would need to come to the House anyway. The hon. Gentleman will recall that that matter was argued in Committee. If I recall rightly, one of the examples aired was of an extensive flood in East Anglia and the possibility of substantial expenditure being required. Clearly, that would require parliamentary approval either under the usual procedure or under an emergency procedure.

We think that after lengthy discussions the figures arrived at in the proposal are generous. I am sure that hon. Members recognise that long-term borrowing powers should more than adequately cover the points made by hon. Members when, often vociferously but mainly in a quiet and gentle manner, they expressed their concern about the arrangements for funding flood emergencies. I am confident that the amendments fully meet that concern, and that, with the addition of these powers, the National Rivers Authority will have the full range of powers that it needs to respond to any future flooding emergencies. They will ensure that flood defence committees will be able to carry out their vital work as effectively as they have carried it out in the past. They also provide a clear demonstration that we are determined to give the NRA all the powers that it needs to operate effectively.

Mr. Allan Roberts (Bootle): The Minister was right to say that the amendments are important. The Government recognised the strength of the case made by Opposition and Conservative Members in Committee when we debated the National Rivers Authority. The main amendment, No. 56, would allow the National Rivers Authority to borrow other than by way of a temporary loan from the Secretary of State or from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food money for capital purposes in connection with flood defence. The amendments set up a system for such spending to be subject to review by the Comptroller and Auditor General and for reports and accounts to be laid before Parliament. We do not object to any of those things, but there are certain items missing from the amendments and the Opposition think that such items should have been included to take the amendments further and to provide for a much more comprehensive system of borrowing powers and freedom to borrow for the National Rivers Authority.

The borrowing is related only to the carrying out of flood defence functions and not to the environmental works that will be the responsibility of the National Rivers Authority and with which I shall shortly deal. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has said, sub-paragraph (1C) of amendment No. 56 limits the amount outstanding on the aggregate of loans to the NRA to

"£100 million or such greater sum, not exceeding £160 million, as the relevant Ministers may specify by order"

which is subject to affirmative resolution. It would be helpful to know the basis for these broad figures. The Minister touched on that, but I do not think that his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley was wholly satisfactory. Will the Government guarantee that all flood defence work likely to be considered desirable by the National Rivers Authority will fall within these limits? What provision will be made for updating the figures against inflation?

The fixing of a ceiling in primary legislation effectively constrains the developments in the capital programme of the National Rivers Authority even in the face of unforeseen requirements. Throughout the progress of the Bill when it was a matter of conforming to EC and environmental standards and of imposing controls that benefit the consumer, the Government left everything subject to the Secretary of State for the Environment who can determine the levels, the figures, the dates, the times and the expenditure as he sees fit. However, when it is a matter of setting expenditure and borrowing levels in the public sector the actual figures have been put down in the Bill by way of amendment and it will be difficult to get them changed. We should like to hear more about that.

The Government's proposals are inadequate in the light of the functions of the National Rivers Authority. We are concerned about how the authority will function and how it will be able to carry out the jobs now done by the water authorities that are being handed over to the NRA. Lord Crickhowell, who will be the chairman of the National Rivers Authority, said:

"Before I leave the subject of charges, I think I should make it absolutely clear that I see it as one of the priority objectives of the new National Rivers Authority to operate a slim, efficient, cost-conscious organisation. The National Rivers Authority will start with a problem. They will inherit existing structures, obligations and commitments to staff. These commitments must be honoured but clearly, as soon as it is in being, it will need to undertake a thorough review of what resources it needs to retain inhouse and what services it might over an appropriate time scale buy in from outside contractors."

We are concerned that if the National Rivers Authority is prevented from borrowing the money that it needs to do all the jobs and tasks that it is being given, and not just flood protection and defences, there will be much outside contracting. There will be an inadequate, slimmed-down authority, that has not got the resources, and will not have the borrowing power, to get on with the job that the majority of hon. Members want it to do.

The functions of the National Rivers Authority include water resource planning, licensing of abstraction and the monitoring of licences; there are no borrowing powers for those. Then there is environmental quality and pollution control. Perhaps the Government do not want the NRA to do effective work on environmental quality and pollution control lest it might deter people from buying into the private companies at the time of flotation. There are no borrowing for those functions. Nor are there borrowing powers for the maintenance, improvement and development of fisheries in inland waters, for conservation and recreation, or for the navigation responsibilities of three water authorities. Nor are there borrowing powers for some of the functions of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution that are being passed to the National Rivers Authority, or for research.

I have left to the end the question of sea defences. Sea defences and flood defences are similar. Why should sea defences be excluded and flood defences included? That is difficult to understand, especially as the funding for both is similar at the moment, in that the water authorities precept on the local authorities in the areas concerned, and the money eventually comes from rates. Perhaps the Government do not want to give borrowing powers for all the environmental activities that the National Rivers Authority will have to deal with, because they do not want rigorous enforcement imposed on a privatised industry. Perhaps the exclusion of sea defences was an oversight by the Government and they should have been included in the amendments.

The National Rivers Authority will be the only national body engaged in environmental control and monitoring water pollution, yet it is to be given only limited borrowing powers for just one of its functions. Of course, borrowing powers are not much good if the Department of the Environment via the Treasury, or the Treasury via the Department of the Environment, prevents the borrowing because the National Rivers Authority is in the public sector and the borrowing cannot go ahead because of public sector borrowing requirement restrictions, something that the Government have claimed they are getting away from by privatising the water industry. The only justification of substance that they have found for their privatisation proposal is that the privatised water industry will be free from PSBR restrictions. Of course, the water industry could be free from such restrictions without being privatised, and merely by a political decision of the Government.

The National Rivers Authority will remain in the public sector. All the environmentally essential functions of the authority will remain in the public sector and are not being freed from PSBR restrictions. The NRA is being emaciated at birth and strangled by lack of power before it even gets going. With the amendments, the Government

have taken a small, tentative step in the right direction. They should move amendments in the other place, if there is not time now, to include borrowing powers for all the functions of the National Rivers Authority. They should give an undertaking that they will release the authority from PSBR restrictions. That can be done in the public sector. British Nuclear Fuels is in the public sector and it does not suffer PSBR restrictions. That precedent could be followed for the water industry, as it will be when we have a Labour Government and we take it back into social ownership.

4.45 pm

We want to know how the borrowing is to be funded. When an organisation borrows it has to pay interest. Is borrowing to be funded by a precept on the local authorities in whose areas the flood defences are situated, or is it to be funded from general taxation? It is ironic that a Conservative Member mentioned comparative competition even in relation to pension schemes. One thing is certain, as is shown by the amendments on borrowing: the legislation will not introduce competition into the supply of water or the treatment and disposal of sewage. Comparative competition is a joke. There will be no competition.

It is amazing. We have in power a Government who are trying to introduce competition into the sale of beer and at the same time private monopolies into the sale of water. The Government will stand condemned because of the inadequacy of the legislation to protect the environment and their inadequate proposals for the National Rivers Authority which they have heralded as a great environmental step forward.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I represent a constituency which must be the most drainage-sensitive area in the United Kingdom, so my constituents are extremely pleased with the Government amendment. I want to take up a point made by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) about flood defence functions. It is my understanding that, under the Land Drainage Act 1976 sea defences and flood protection of sea defences are in the same category as flood protection and land drainage in internal land areas.

Before the amendment was tabled, there was great concern in the Fens of East Anglia that necessary works might be put back or even deferred indefinitely because of the problems associated with raising finance to do necessary work. The problems arise fundamentally from the need to raise capital to meet emergencies and to do the necessary long-term work. There is an example at the moment at the development stage of Anglian Water for the constituency of Cambridgeshire, Nort-East—the middle and south level barrier banks and Ouse washes scheme. That work is being undertaken by the Great Ouse local land drainage committee. The scheme will cost about £20 million. The main elements will be constructed over a four year period, with expenditure of about £5 million per annum. That compares with the normal expenditure of the committee of an average of £3 million each year, so a colossal increase in expenditure is required.

The Ouse washes scheme is a repair of the magnificent drainage channels constructed by the Dutchman Vermuyden, in the 17th century. They have lasted well from that date, but they are in need of repair. Some seepage is taking place into surrounding farmland which hon. Members will be interested to know is 10 to 12 ft below the water level in the channels. Therefore, it is vital that the necessary remedial work is done on the banks.

If the Government had not come forward with the amendment, there would have been serious implications for the local community in raising the necessary finance. Normally such capital projects are financed by a precept on the county council rate. Under normal circumstances, without the amendment, the increase would have been 34·7 per cent. from 1 April this year. Without the borrowing powers, a further 40 per cent. increase would have been necessary during the period of construction. The effect of the precepts on the internal drainage boards is even more dramatic, because the impact falls on the boards which benefit from the schemes instead of being spread over a much larger area. Increases of up to 90 per cent. would have applied from 1 April this year and further increases of up to 80 per cent. during the period of a scheme's expenditure.

It is obvious that my constituents who pay county council rates and those in the vicinity of the Ouse-Wash banks who pay the necessary drainage rates to their local internal drainage boards are delighted with the Government's amendment. They believe that the amount specified in the amendment of up to £160 million will more than cover the needs of Cambridgeshire and the Fens to the end of this century and beyond. That money also includes provision for considerable flood protection work necessary on the east coast, particularly at Aldeburgh and further north in Norfolk.

The Government have listened carefully to representations from the farming community, from landowners and from my constituents. I know that representations have also been made by many of my hon. Friends and I am grateful to the Government for listening carefully to them and for producing the necessary amendment.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am pleased to welcome the amendment. As hon. Members have said, there was pressure in Standing Committee about this point. I was involved in those debates in Standing Committee because of the implications of this part of the Bill for my constituency, which suffers in many ways from problems of flooding.

The hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) raised a point which the Minister must clarify. I had assumed that the amendment would cover the effects from the sea. The Minister would help us if he could confirm that when he replies. If the amendment covers flooding from rivers but not from the sea, there will be a ridiculous situation in some estuarial waters where water enters the area during storms from the sea and the river. In that situation there would have to be a demarcation between which water has caused what damage. There would also be questions about the necessary investment to repair that damage. The Glaslyn estuary near Porthmadog in my constituency has a cob which acts as the sea defence works. However, much of the flooding in that area is caused by water from Snowdonia moving down the river. The Minister may be aware of that example and he must consider it when he replies.

The amendment is welcome as far as it goes. It is unnecessary to build into the Bill the requirement for an amendment to primary legislation if in due course there needs to be a figure over and above £160 million. I cannot see the need for that.

[Mr. Dafydd Wigley]

An order before the House would be sufficient to raise the figure to the required level. If an order is to be brought before the House, the Government must introduce it and it must have the support of both Chambers. That must surely be sufficient sanction without the need to build in an amendment to primary legislation. I do not see the need for such rigidity in the Bill.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman is making a valid point. When we consider the approvals which must be secured from Ministers and Treasury, it is nonsense for the limit of £160 million to be included in the Bill, when Ministers must be convinced that that limit must be achieved. We must be able to achieve this more easily.

Mr. Wigley: Exactly. Perhaps the Government will consider whether this part of the Bill can be further amended in another place.

When the Minister responds, will he clarify the Department's responsibilities in Wales even when, at this late stage, the Bill is dripping its way to another place for further consideration?

Schedule 1 refers to

"the Secretary of State and the Minister".

In Wales the Secretary of State and the Minister are the same person. Will the Minister confirm that the Secretary of State for Wales will have responsibility for the whole of Wales, or does he have responsibility only for that part of Wales covered by the regional division of the NRA which is located in Wales? It would be helpful for the people outside this place who must work with this legislation if that point can be clarified. It is not entirely clear now.

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend the Minister has already referred to the modest part that I played in Standing Committee on this subject. Those hon. Members who served on the Committee will be aware that I made two speeches about this topic. I introduced an amendment and replied to it at some length. Having expressed my feelings rather strongly in Committee, it would be churlish of me if I did not immediately thank the Government for meeting my substantial concerns which reflected the concerns of many people who have the interests of land drainage at heart by introducing this amendment today.

Although it is inevitable that the Opposition must oppose, they were less than gracious in their welcome for the amendment and in the way in which they sought to use the amendment as a lever to move to further sunlit uplands of unlimited and extravagant Government expenditure.

We remember the economic doctrines espoused by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) who must not be confused with the distinguished economist, Mr. Roger Bootle. The doctrine espoused by the hon. Member for Bootle was one of limitless Government expenditure, unbridled borrowing and the inevitable consequences. I can understand why the Government have seen fit to impose certain restrictions on the NRA's borrowing powers, even within the concessions that they have announced today.

Those of us with any experience of working in a Government Department and dealing with the Treasury must fully understand the difficulties of making a case for public spending and the absolutely essential role of the Treasury as the thin red line to curtail spending. I believe that the Government have probably got the balance about right in this amendment.

The Opposition expressed particular concern about the sum involved. It is significant that a sum of up to £160 million is not far away from one year's expenditure on land drainage by the existing water authorities. That is a generous and appropriate allocation.

The Opposition also question whether the amendment's scope should be extended beyond the emergency requirements of land drainage. At this stage I believe that that is not necessary. The hon. Member for Bootle did not make the point clearly enough that the bulk of NRA funding will come from grant aid which will be considered by the Treasury and debated in the estimates in this House. That is the proper way to run Government expenditure. I will not complain if the Government have not given us the whole loaf, when they have given us nine tenths of it.

I hope that the Government will pause and consider whether it would be better, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) suggested, to introduce an order-making power for flexibility. The last thing that Ministers want is to introduce primary legislation.

If the limit of £160 million needed to be breached for good reason, the last thing that they would want is a separate Bill. They would have to wait to tack the measure on to another Bill and there would be an unnecessary delay. The Government's readiness to listen to our arguments in Committee and their readiness to resist any mechanism which might add to delay, has caused them to introduce this amendment today. Let us have the right figure and the right mechanism to increase that figure if that is necessary in future.

5 pm

Mr. Livsey: One of the things one must welcome is that this amendment involves flood defences but, of course, flood defences only. One can just about remember crises as far back as 1953, when there was immense flooding on the east coast. The £168 million ceiling may be adequate in some senses, particularly perhaps in Cambridgeshire, but may not be adequate to cover the whole of England and Wales. That problem may need to be addressed in future. Will the Minister tell us whether this figure will be indexed over the years, or, indeed, as the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) just mentioned, whether there is at least a possibility of bringing in an order to update such a figure for future expenditure? The fact remains that this involves cash limits by the Treasury on the NRA.

A lot has been said by the Government during the course of the Bill about the gamekeeper-poacher aspect of the Bill. Effectively, this places restrictions on the gamekeeper, and we do not want a toothless environmental protection agency.

I believe that more flexibility beyond flood defences in the financing of the NRA is needed. Sea defences have already been mentioned, and I am sure the Minister will be clarifying that in his wind-up on these amendments.

There are extremely important aspects of funding, such as pollution; the environment; fisheries; and indeed, on the River Wyre, which runs through my constituency, navigation. The press release from the Department of the Environment of 15 March on the provisions made in this amendment indicated restrictions on borrowing powers for unplanned expenditure; at least, one could deduce that.

Really, loan finance is required for all capital expenditure on a planned basis, and I hope that amendments to this effect will be tabled in the other place to enable adequate funding of the NRA. I would like to test the Minister's attitude to capital as far as aspects other than flood defences are concerned, and see whether there is any flexibility in the Government's attitude towards this type of expenditure.

Mr. Moynihan: On the question of guarantees, the long-term borrowing under this amendment is of course for Government, so there is no question of the Government needing to guarantee it. On the subject of borrowing powers applying to sea defences, the arguments of the hon. Member (Mr. Livsey) were compelling. They are, of course, accurate; it would lead to a number of absurdities if distinction were drawn between sea defences and the problems of flooding from rivers. Sea defences are included.

Mr. Allan Roberts: It is not clear from the amendment. Will the Minister make sure that it is clear and that it does cover sea defences? If not, will he amend the amendment in the other place?

Mr. Moynihan: If further clarification of the words I have just spoken from this Dispatch Box is needed, of course we will seek to clarify that in the legislation. If that satisfies the hon. Member, I will move on to the next issue. I confirm that that is definitely the case, but we will look carefully to see whether any further action is required and, if necessary, bring forward proposals in another place.

As far as the overall funding is concerned, we have said repeatedly that the NRA will be fully funded by Exchequer grant in aid, covering all important areas of work which hon. Members on both sides of the House have mentioned this evening. Of course, they will also be funded by capital grants for flood defence and land drainage projects, as outlined in the financial memorandum at the front of the Bill. These sources of income will be complemented by the borrowing powers this amendment introduces. As I have said, we believe the limit on borrowing will be adequate for the time being. However, if at any time it needs to be raised, we will have to come back to the House.

I appreciate the points mentioned by hon. Members on the possibility of a simpler method to enable swift action. We do not anticipate that that will be necessary, but I will respond to hon. Members if I may have time to consider it. I hope that the House will forgive me for not being in a position to give a more comprehensive answer to that specific point this evening, but I give an assurance that, if we feel action is necessary, we will reflect and come back to the House, or possibly to the other place.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Is the Minister saying that, on the advent of the NRA, if it finds that the restrictions interfere with its capital planning programme, it could come back to the Department and the Minister will come back to the House to consider raising the ceiling?

Mr. Moynihan: That is right. We are very satisfied that £100 million is a generous limit to NRA borrowing. It can be increased over £160 million by order. We cannot conceive that it will need to be increased to that level, but the point the hon. Member makes is valid. At the moment, the limit could be increased over £160 million only by primary legislation.

I hope I have responded satisfactorily to hon. Members on both sides in saying that if, on reflection, we believe that that is not satisfactory and there could be a simpler way of doing so, we will see if it is workable. Given the very high limits we have looked at, after detailed discussion with the water authorities, we believe that it is accurate.

An important point was made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) about the Secretary of State's responsibility in Wales, a point to which I am delighted to try to respond, although I am not sure it will meet with his total approval. Suffice to say that for the moment the Secretary of State for Wales will be responsible for authorising loans applied for by the regional flood defence committee based in the area of Welsh Water. That will be the parameters within which he will work. He will not be authorising loans applied for elsewhere in Wales.

I am only sorry that I have not had the opportunity, when reflecting on the important points that the hon. Gentleman made, of actually seeing the Glaslyn estuary myself. I have always enjoyed the privilege and pleasure of going to see Wales, not least because the Wye valley is an important area for me, as I was educated in Monmouth. I am more than confident that the NRA is not only sufficiently financed but, with these powers, will be in a strong enough financial position to carry out the work he envisages.

Mr. Wigley: The point going through my mind was that work in the past has involved local authorities, but local authorities come entirely under the Secretary of State for Wales. The Minister is now saying that the responsibility of the Secretary of State is only in part of Wales, those parts of Wales which come under him for local government purposes, and that those parts which for water purposes come under the Secretary of State for the Environment will in fact come entirely under the Secretary of State for Environment as far as loan permission is concerned. At least we are clear, even if we do not agree.

Mr. Moynihan: I said in my initial response just now that I was not sure whether the hon. Member would be completely satisfied by my words, but the words I have placed on the record are accurate for the position at present.

I hope that that has adequately responded to the various points.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 56, in page 186, line 28, leave out sub-paragraph (2) and insert—

'(1B) Subject to sub-paragraph (1C) below, the authority may borrow, otherwise than by way of temporary loan, such sums in sterling from the Secretary of State or the Minister, as it may require for capital purposes in connection with the carrying out of its flood defence functions.

(1C) The aggregate amount outstanding in respect of the principal of sums borrowed under this paragraph by the Authority shall not at any time exceed £100 million or such greater sum, not exceeding £160 million, as the relevant Ministers may specify by order made by statutory instrument.

(1D) No order shall be made under sub-paragraph (1C) above unless a draft of the order has been laid before the House of Commons and has been approved by a resolution of that House.

(1E) In this paragraph "flood defence functions" has the same meaning as in paragraph 16 above.

Loans to the Authority

18A.—(1) The Secretary of State and the Minister shall each have power, with the approval of the Treasury, to lend any sums to the Authority which the Authority has power to borrow under paragraph 18(1B) above.

[Mr. Moynihan]

(2) Any loan made by the Secretary of State or the Minister under this paragraph shall be repaid to him at such times and by such methods, and interest on the loan shall be paid to him at such rates and at such times as the Secretary of State or, as the case may be, the Minister may with the approval of the Treasury from time to time determine.

(3) Any sums required by the Secretary of State or the Minister for making a loan under this paragraph shall be paid out of money provided by Parliament; and any sums received by the Secretary of State or the Minister in pursuance of sub-paragraph (2) above shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

(4) The Secretary of State and the Minister shall each—

(a) prepare in respect of each financial year an account of the sums lent by him to the Authority under this paragraph; and

(b) before the end of September in the following financial year send that account to the Comptroller and Auditor General;

and the form of the account and the manner of preparing it shall be such as the Treasury may direct.

(5) The Comptroller and Auditor General shall examine, certify and report on each account sent to him under this paragraph and shall lay copies of it and of his report before each House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Moynihan.]*

Schedule 2

SCHEMES PROVIDING FOR THE INITIAL TRANSFERS

Mr. Pike: I beg to move amendment No. 133, in page 190, line 2, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

This is an important amendment which deals with a different aspect of pensions from that in the first group of amendments, which we welcome because they clarify the position and constitute a change from the proposals on Second Reading and in Committee. However, our amendment deals with an area about which we are not fully satisfied, and unless the Minister is prepared to move further we intend to have a Division on it.

Earlier the Minister made one or two helpful comments. He described the role of the trustees and said that two trustees would be representatives of members and would be part of the trust's governing body. He said that in some situations all trustees would need to agree before certain action was taken. Those were important and welcome announcements.

However, we are still not 100 per cent. convinced that once the water industry is privatised its employees will have the mirror image scheme with conditions as good as those to which they are currently entitled. We recognise that the Bill takes care of existing pensioners and safeguards pension rights earned to date. We welcome the progress that has been made in removing any ambiguity or doubt. However, we want to ensure that those working in the industry and those who may come into it will have a pension scheme that is at least as good as the existing one.

The Minister has said that he is worried about the number of schemes and whether they can be set up and administered in a proper way. Having served in different capacities on two pension funds before entering the House I recognise that this is a complex subject. I was an employee representative on the Philips staff pension fund, a very large fund, and an employer representative on the Lancashire county council superannuation fund.

The amendment may not be the best way to achieve what we are seeking, but I am sure that the Minister understands the spirit of it and I hope that he will at least say that if we do not divide the House the Government will move a little further and ensure that one pension fund is established to cover all employees within the privatised water industry, which will guarantee our objectives. If the Minister promises to bring forward an amendment in the other place, that may be acceptable.

Our amendment is simple. It changes the word "may" to "shall". However, as we all know, that is an important change. "May" is permissive and means that something may happen. Given the spirit in which the Government have responded today, I accept that that is what they intend, but that does not mean that it will happen. However, if our amendment were agreed to, the position would be clear because it removes all ambiguity. The Minister says that he does not believe that such a statutory requirement should be included in the Bill, while saying that that is the direction in which the Government wish to go. I find it difficult to understand why the Minister should say that, but is not prepared to put it in the Bill. It is a small area of difference.

On pensions, the difference between us is small and the Government should take the further step that the Opposition, employees in the industry and the trade unions representing them are seeking. It would not be a great step for them to accept the amendment, but it is an important one, and I hope that the Minister will respond positively.

5.15 pm

As there is now only a small difference between us on the pensions issue, it would be silly for the Government not to concede this final point. The Government have so many problems with other aspects of the Bill—we shall be debating those on Third Reading—that they should welcome the opportunity to eliminate one problem now. They say that they want the mirror image scheme, so why not put it in the Bill and remove this little problem?

The Opposition are rightly worried about protecting conditions of employment on privatisation. In the years to come pensions will be a matter of growing concern to many people. Twenty or thirty years ago many people did not regard company pensions as of great importance, but over the years there has been a considerable change of attitude. Pensions now are rightly viewed as an important part of any employment package.

I have served on the Standing Committees on many other privatisation Bills. Despite ministerial undertakings, pension issues have not been resolved to the satisfaction of employees. I well remember debates on the royal ordnance factories and the arguments about TUPE '81. Protection can be given up to the date of vesting and privatisation, but whatever the Minister says, if it is not in the Bill it is not worth the paper it is printed on. Decisions are not based on what is written in *Hansard*. If a matter goes to court, it is what is in the Bill that counts. The Minister knows that that is the important difference. He knows that if he wants to see a mirror image scheme he should go a little further and include the word "shall" in the Bill.

The Minister also knows that if some small pension schemes could not do exactly what the amendment seeks, he could easily say that the Government are prepared to come forward with a better proposal which will deal with the Opposition's points and give the necessary guarantees to the employees.

All that we are seeking in moving this simple but important amendment is to guarantee that employees

presently in the industry will have their future pension earnings protected, whether they be my daughters or the sons or daughters of other hon. Members. They should have the safeguard of a pension scheme that is at least as good as the existing scheme.

If that is what the Minister wants to see, let him accept the amendment or say that the Government will introduce an amendments in another place to give that guarantee. We believe that those working in the industry now and those who enter it in the years ahead are entitled to such protection.

Whatever the Minister may say or mean today will mean nothing if it is not guaranteed by the Bill which, when it becomes an Act, will be binding. I hope that the Minister will say, even at this late stage, that he is prepared to think again and accept the wisdom of moving in the direction that amendment No. 133 suggests.

Mr. Allen McKay: While Ministers may give assurances in good faith, there is always the possibility that their successors will go against those assurances. That has happened time and again. Consequently, we always seek, particularly in respect of pension matters, a provision in the Bill that backs a Minister's assurances and provides a positive commitment so that people who have worked in an industry for many years, as well as those who enter it in future, may be sure of an adequate pension.

I hope that the Minister will look favourably on amendment No. 133. It is not that we disbelieve the Minister or question his intentions, but within a very short time, Ministers change, and successors may view the pension aspect very differently. It is important to workers in the industry to have an assurance that their pension fund is in order and that their pensions are adequately protected. It has been said that workers could withdraw their money and transfer it to a private pension scheme. Unfortunately, private schemes depend on the performance of investments, with the result that the value of their pensions can reduce. Local government and water authority pension schemes do not reduce in value and are index-linked, whereas private schemes are not. By putting his assurances into the legislation, the Minister can ensure that pensions will retain the value that they have today, which is important to those concerned about their financial future.

I hope that the Minister will give favourable consideration to the amendment, or to any similar amendment that is presented in another place. If his assurances are written into the Bill, no one will be able to go against them later—which is something that no right hon. or hon. Member in any part of the House would wish to see happen.

Mr. Moynihan: The thrust of the speech of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) concerned pensions, but schedule 2 has nothing to do with pensions. It deals with transfer schemes.

The amendment requires that any transfer scheme made under schedule 2 must provide for all the detailed supplemental provisions set out in schedule 2(3)(2). The word "may" has been used to provide a very necessary element of flexibility in the supplemental arrangements. The drawing up of schemes of transfer will be a complex undertaking, and it would be ridiculous to require the schemes to provide for all the supplemental provisions set out in schedule 2(3)(2) irrespective of the particular circumstances.

One of the supplemental provisions, set out in paragraph (3)(2)(e), enables a transfer scheme to provide for continuity of employment. I expected that the debate would concentrate on that point. In Committee, my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning gave clear assurances about the rights of staff which I am happy to repeat. The contracts of existing water authority staff will be transferred either to the water services plcs or to the National Rivers Authority. The Secretary of State will not approve schemes of transfer made under schedule 2 unless they provide for continuity of employment. Having repeated that assurance, and taking into account the advantage that the Bill's existing wording provides in terms of necessary flexibility, I ask the House to reject the amendment.

On the specific points made by the hon. Member for Burnley, I repeat that the whole point of the mirror image schemes is to make certain that our objective of ensuring that no pensioner is disadvantaged by the act of transferring liability from a water authority to its successor company is achieved and that responsibility for payment is clear both to the recipient and to the body that will be responsible for it. An enormous number of factors will be taken into account in the deeds, including the responsibilities to be transferred to the NRA, gratuity awards, injury allowance, retirement compensation, pension enhancements, and pensions payable to former water authority chairmen and board members through determinations made by the Secretary of State. The question of what is to be in those deeds will be overwritten by our absolute determination that not one pensioner will be disadvantaged. I hope that that clarifies the position. It will probably not deter the hon. Member for Burnley from dividing the House, but I hope that the points I have made will dissuade him from doing so.

Ms. Walley: The Minister referred to the many general aspects to which the schedule refers, but we choose to concentrate on pensions because of our belief that pensions and the long-term interests of water authority employees are of paramount importance. We particularly want to focus attention on protecting employees' long-term interests and pension rights.

We are right to be concerned about the aspects raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). Some of the employees about whom we are speaking, when they retire, will have given a lifetime of public service to the water industry, and on reaching the end of their careers they are entitled to the same rights as those that they expected at the beginning of their careers. Some of the Government's proposals relate only to employees' short-term interests and do not properly safeguard pension rights.

The only way of ensuring that workers retain their existing pension rights is by incorporating adequate protection in the Bill. If that cannot be done this afternoon, I hope that the Minister will agree—as he has in respect of the costs of funding land drainage—to return at a later stage with a safeguard of the kind that the amendment seeks.

Just to concentrate on pensions, it is important to understand the present situation. I should like to clarify that, because most people in the water industry are

[Ms. Walley]

currently in the water authorities superannuation fund, which is exactly the same as the local authorities superannuation scheme. I do not want to suggest that absolutely everything about it was marvellous—I was lobbied only recently about the way in which women are discriminated against in one small part of the scheme when it comes to widowers' rights—but the point is that the benefits of the scheme are statutory, as is the scheme itself. There is also automatic index-linking of the pensions.

Earlier in the debate the Minister touched on what he referred to as peripheral matters relating to pensions which, in a way, pre-empted the debate that we are having now; but it is equally important that we concentrate on the basic aspects of pensions and index-linking which we would like to see.

5.30 pm

Last year, the water authorities wanted to set up their own pension schemes, linked to privatisation but technically separate. This particular scheme could have advantages in so far as it would not necessarily discriminate against women, but it is a trust-based scheme governed by trustees, so is not statutory. I was very interested in the comments that the Minister made earlier when he talked about mirror image schemes not having any place as a concept when it came to privatisation.

We do not accept that the trust schemes themselves can give exactly the kind of statutory backing that is required now and in the future. That is why we want this amendment changed. We are concerned that index-linking is not guaranteed. The Government now say that the people who go to the National Rivers Authority will be able to maintain their membership of the water authorities superannuation fund but that those who stay with the private companies must choose either to maintain the current accrued benefits, that is, frozen benefits, or transfer to the water authorities scheme, or that each water authority will set up a mirror image of the water authorities superannuation fund.

It is this latter mirror image scheme which concerns us. Any future improvements will not be guaranteed in this scheme and there is constant pressure to remove the elements of the water authorities superannuation fund which discriminate against women, which are likely to change in the not-too-distant future. In addition, the mirror image will be not statutory but trust-based. We ask why it cannot be enshrined in law. We are very concerned lest the trustees change their minds in the future. Although in debate on previous amendments the Minister mentioned that two out of six trustees would be members and also that if any trustees objected to the winding up of a trust fund it would not be wound up, we do not feel that those safeguards are sufficient to protect the long-term pension rights of people who have trusted that their pension rights would be safeguarded for as long as necessary.

One of the problems facing employees—this is something else connected with this amendment which the Minister might like to take up in another place—is that they are now having to choose which pension scheme is best suited to their needs; but people cannot yet make an informed decision because the proposals are still before Parliament, which may change certain features—I hope that we can indeed do so.

It is unfortunate, in view of all this, that the water authorities set a deadline of 31 March 1989, a date which has already passed, to enable employees to transfer to their scheme with pension rights safeguarded. They now say that they will not guarantee the transfer with all qualifying service as of right—that is, transfer on a year-to-year basis of pension payments. They will not say how much and on what terms previous service will count in pension assessment. In view of that, is there any hope that at this very late stage the Government will consider extending the 31 March deadline?

This is another of the amendments by which we would like to make absolutely certain that the present and future well-being of employees is enshrined in the legislation, particularly when it comes to safeguarding the pension rights of people who have been, are and will be employed in the water industry. It is for this reason that we tabled the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 203, Noes 308.

Division No. 135] **[5.35 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*

Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsCW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil

Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 4

Customer Service Committees

Amendment made: No. 96 in page 194, line 2, at end insert—

'Public access to meetings

7. In paragraph 1 of the Schedule to the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (bodies to which Act applies in England and Wales), at the end there shall be inserted the following sub-paragraph—

"(i) customer service committees established and maintained under the Water Act 1989.";

and the functions of a customer service committee shall be regarded as public functions for the purposes of that Act.'.
—*[Miss Emma Nicholson.]*

Schedule 5

Transitional Provision on Termination of Appointments

Mr. Moynihan: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 198, line 9 leave out from 'provision' to end of line 11 and insert

'which corresponds in relation to any enactment mentioned in Schedule 23 to this Act to any provision made by that Schedule or makes similar provision in relation to any other enactment;'.

Schedule 5(6) enables the Secretary of State, in connection with the making of a replacement appointment or variation of area under clause 11, to make transitional provisions and savings, if he thinks it appropriate, by order. The paragraph as drafted allows any provision corresponding to one made in relation to the transfer date by schedule 23.

The purpose of this technical amendment is simply to broaden schedule 5(6) so that, following the making of a replacement appointment or variation of area, it will be possible to make transitional provisions which correspond not only to the provisions made in respect of the legislation mentioned in schedule 23 but also to other, for example future, legislation.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 8

Sewerage Functions

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I beg to move amendment No. 145, in page 208, line 9, at end insert—

'Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Act 1944 (c. 26)

(1) In section 1(1) of the Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Act 1944 (government contributions towards expenses of water authorities for the purposes of rural water supplies and sewerage) the words "subject to such conditions as the Treasury may determine," shall be omitted.

(2) For the words "may, in any case in which it appears to him to be desirable so to do, undertake to make a contribution" there shall be substituted the words "shall make a contribution of at least 50 per cent.".

(3) The words "provided that the Minister shall not undertake to make a contribution towards the expenses of making provision for the sewerage, or the disposal of the sewage, of a rural locality unless he is satisfied that the need for making the provision is due to anything done or proposed to be done, whether before or after the passing of this Act, to supply, or increase the supply of, water in pipes in that locality." shall be omitted.'.

As I represent a rural constituency, I am moving this probing amendment so that I may ask the Minister some questions which are of interest to those who live in rural areas.

At present, local Government meets about 50 per cent. of the cost of the schemes to which my amendment refers and I am wondering how much of present legislation is a legacy of the past. In 1989, sewerage services should be available in all areas, except in really isolated places where provision would be uneconomic. Under current requisition procedures, rural sewerage facilities are not being provided adequately, and it would seem that the Government should adopt a totally different approach to this issue.

When I raised the matter in Committee I said that, while the problem affected only about 5 per cent. of households, it was serious problem nevertheless. I am not suggesting the schemes should apply to isolated houses or hamlets, but, as I said in Committee, some quite large villages can be without sewerage schemes. For example, Wormley in Surrey is a semi-urban area with about 400 houses, and Claxby in my constituency is a relatively large village which has been campaigning for some time to have a sewerage scheme.

Under existing legislation, water authorities have a general duty to provide such a scheme, but the local authority must requisition the scheme. As the local authority pays about 50 per cent. of the cost, there is no incentive for the authority to do that. That results in much buck-passing among local authorities, water authorities and the Government, so that schemes of this type rarely come to light.

I do not suggest that my amendment is the only way forward or that the Government should necessarily pay as large a contribution as I suggest. I hope, however, that the Government will look into the problem which, while small in national terms, is important to rural communities.

Mr. Wigley: I support the amendmemt because the circumstances described by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) obtain in many rural areas. They certainly do in mine, and I would not belittle scattered hamlets, which also have the right to modern facilities.

It is important for us to consider how financial assistance of the type that we are discussing will be available once the Bill becomes law. In that context, the amendment may not go far enough, but it would be a move in the right direction, and considering that it has been proposed by a Government Member, we in the Opposition should support it.

The hon. Gentleman described it as a probing amendment. I regard it as stronger than that. It should be added to the Bill; and if the Government say that it is too untidy as drafted, they could accept the principle involved in it and tidy it up in another place.

Mr. Moynihan: Clause 69 gives owners, occupiers and certain public bodies, including local authorities, the right to require a sewerage undertaker to provide a public sewer. The person requisitioning the sewer is required to pay over 12 years any difference between the charges for the use of the sewer and the cost incurred by the undertaker in providing it.

Rural sewerage grant is available under the Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Act 1944 to reduce the cost which would otherwise fall on those requisitioning a public sewer. It is paid to the undertaker on condition that it is used to reduce the deficit payments required from the local authority or the owners and occupiers requisitioning schemes. The grant is paid at the rate of 35 per cent. of the eligible cost of a scheme or 35 per cent. of £3,310 per property served, whichever is the lower. In 1987-88, grant totalling £4 million was approved in respect of 68 sewerage schemes.

The purpose of amendment 145, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) pointed out, is to require the Secretary of State to pay grant at a rate of at least 50 per cent. of the cost of the works. I believe that it would be unfair and undesirable to increase the rate of grant in the way my hon. Friend suggests and to compel the Secretary of State to pay grant in all cases at a particular minimum level.

Mr. Wigley: Why?

Mr. Moynihan: Because it would favour those areas where provision of necessary first-time sewerage had been slow in comparison with areas where the water authority and the local authorities between them had made good progress. It would be undesirable because higher rates of grant would remove to some extent the financial discipline on both water undertakers and local authorities to ensure that requisitioned schemes were both justified and economically designed.

I hope that what I have said will reassure my hon. Friend about the arrangements and that he will agree to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Leigh: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Hon. Members: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): In that case, I must put the Question.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 172, Noes 310.

Division No. 136] **[5.59 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott

Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dafydd Wigley and
Mr. Richard Livsey.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas

Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Six o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [6 February] and the resolutions [21 March] to put forthwith the Questions on the remaining amendments moved by a member of the Government.*

Schedule 10

PROVISIONS RELATING TO METERS ETC.

Amendments made: No. 65, in page 214, line 52, at end insert—

'(1A) The power under sub-paragraph (1) to carry out works specified in sub-paragraph (2) below shall include power to carry out such works in a street; and the power conferred by virtue of sub-paragraph (1) (c) of paragraph 2 of Schedule 18 to this Act and sub-paragraphs (4) to (6), (8) and (9) of that paragraph and paragraph 3 of that Schedule shall apply in relation to the power conferred by this sub-paragraph as they apply in relation to the powers conferred by the said paragraph 2.'.

No. 66, in page 215, line 1, leave out 'sub-paragraph (1)' and insert

'sub-paragraphs (1) and (1A)'.

No. 67, in page 215, line 13, leave out 'on those premises'.

No. 68, in page 216, line 10, leave out 'on any premises'.

No. 69, in page 216, line 46, after 'above', insert 'on any premises'.

No. 70, in page 218, line 14, after 'works', insert 'on any premises'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 12

AMENDMENTS OF THE WATER RESOURCES ACT 1963

Amendments made: No. 28, in page 230, line 25, at end insert—

'(3) In subsection (6) of that section, at the end there shall be inserted the words "and the quantity of water authorised to be abstracted from the strata in any period of twenty-four hours does not exceed twenty cubic metres in aggregate.".'.

No. 29, in page 233, line 5, at end insert—

'Section 131 of the 1963 Act

.—(1) In section 131 (2) (a) of the 1963 Act (licence in respect of waters owned or managed by the British Waterways Board), after "Act" there shall be inserted the words "and no person other than the Board or a person authorised for the purpose by the Board may be given a consent for the purposes of section 24 (1A) of this Act".'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 14

AMENDMENTS OF THE LAND DRAINAGE ACT 1976

Amendments made: No. 49, in page 242, line 43, leave out 'by the Minister' and insert

'jointly by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State'.

No. 50, in page 243, line 16, leave out 'by the Minister' and insert

'jointly by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 16

TRANSFER OF FISHERIES FUNCTIONS TO THE AUTHORITY.

Amendments made: No. 4, in page 255, line 4, at end insert

'( ) In section 6(3) (definition of "unauthorised fixed engine"), at the end of paragraph (c) there shall be inserted the words "or

(d) a fixed engine which is placed and used by the National Rivers Authority with the consent of, or in accordance with a general authorisation given by, the Minister or the Secretary of State."'.

No. 5, in page 255, line 19, leave out from '(3)' to end of line 20 and insert

'for the words from "by", in the first place where it occurs, onwards three shall be substituted the words "on an application made to him by the National Rivers Authority, by order made by statutory instrument make provision in relation to an area defined by the order—

(a) for the imposition on the owners and occupiers of fisheries in that area of requirements to pay contributions to that Authority of such amounts as may be determined under the order in respect of the expenses of the carrying out in relation to that area of that Authority's functions with respect to fisheries;

(b) for such contributions to be paid or recovered in such manner and to be refundable in such circumstances as may be specified in or determined under the order;

(c) for the modification, in relation to the fisheries in that area, of any provisions of this Act relating to the regulation of fisheries or of any provisions of a local Act relating to any fishery in that area;

and an order under this subsection may contain such supplemental, consequential and transitional provision, including provision for the payment of compensation to persons injuriously affected by the order, as may appear to be necessary or expedient in connection with the other provisions of the order."'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 18

POWERS WITH RESPECT TO THE LAYING AND MAINTENANCE OF PIPES ETC.

Amendments made: No. 71, in page 260, line 5, after '(4)' insert

'Without prejudice to paragraph 1 (1A) of Schedule 10 to this Act,'—

page 263, line 50, at end insert—

'(6A) Where, apart from this sub-paragraph, any person entitled to an interest in any land would be entitled under this paragraph to an amount of compensation in respect of any works, there shall be

deducted from that amount an amount equal to the amount by which the carrying out of the works has enhanced the value of any other land which—

(a) is contiguous or adjacent to that land; and

(b) is land to an interest in which that person is entitled in the same capacity.'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 22

Minor and Consequential Amendments

Amendments made: No. 73, in page 290, line 41, at end insert—

'and, in paragraph 12(6), after the words "paragraph (b)" there shall be inserted the words "or paragraph (bb)".'.

No. 74, in page 291, line 31 after 'undertakers', insert 'or the National Rivers Authority'.

No. 75, in page 291, line 32, after 'undertakers', insert 'or the National Rivers Authority'.

No. 76, in page 291, line 34, after 'undertakers', insert 'or the National Rivers Authority'.

No. 42, in page 299, line 6, at end insert—

'The Water (Scotland) Act 1980 (c. 45)

50A. In section 31 of the Water (Scotland) Act 1980 (consultation with authorities in England) for the words "water authorities" there shall be substituted the words "water undertakers".'.

No. 6, in page 305, line 44, at end insert—

'(3) In paragraph 10(1)(b) of Schedule 5 to that Act (exemption for hereditaments subject to contributions under paragraph 1(a) of Schedule 3 to the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act (1975), for the words from "paragraph 1(a)" onwards there shall be substituted the words "section 28(3)(a) of that Act.".".—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 23

Transitional Provisions and Savings

Amendments made: No. 92, in page 306, line 11, at end insert—

'(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide for any liability which is—

(a) saved by virtue of this paragraph; and

(b) transferred in accordance with a scheme under Schedule 2 to this Act to a successor company,

to be transferred, at a time when that company is wholly owned by the Crown, to that company's nominated holding company.'.

No. 93, in page 306, line 18, at end insert—

'(2) The Secretary of State may by regulations make such transitional provisions and savings as he considers appropriate in relation to so much of any provision having effect immediately before the transfer date by or under any enactment as provides for or relates to the payment by a water authority of pensions, allowances or gratuities to or in respect of persons who have been—

(a) officers or employees of any person whose activities at any time before the transfer date appear to the Secretary of State to have consisted in, or to have been connected with, the carrying out of any function which is transferred by this Act or which corresponds to any such function or to any other function under this Act; or

(b) chairmen or members of any body whose activities at any such time so appear to the Secretary of State.

(3)Without prejudice to the generality of sub-paragraph (2) above or to any transfer in accordance with a scheme under Schedule 2 to this Act of any liability saved by regulations under that sub-paragraph such regulations may—

(a) subject to sub-paragraphs (4) and (5) below, impose requirements on the Authority, on any successor company or on the nominated holding company of any successor company;

(b) modify any such provision as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (2) above;

(c) in the case of regulations made after the transfer date, require provision contained in the regulations to be treated as if it came into force on that date.

(4) No requirement shall be imposed on any company by any regulations under sub-paragraph (2) above made after the company has ceased to be wholly owned by the Crown; but a company's ceasing to be wholly owned by the Crown shall not affect any requirement imposed on it by any regulations under that sub-paragraph made before the company ceased to be so wholly owned.

(5) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to pay the Authority out of money provided by Parliament all such sums as the Authority may require for fulfilling requirements imposed on it by regulations under sub-paragraph (2) above.

(6) The reference in sub-paragraph (2) above to the payment of pensions, allowances or gratuities includes a reference to the payment of compensation for loss of office or of any such compensation as is payable to or in respect of an officer or employee for any other reason.'.

No. 22, in page 310, line 37, leave out from beginning to 'in' in line 39 and insert—

'(4) On and after the transfer date subsection (6A) of section 70 of this Act shall apply, as it applies in relation to the sums mentioned in that subsection,'.

No. 60, in page 319, line 20, at end insert

'; and no licence may be granted by virtue of this paragraph in relation to any waters to which section 131 of the 1963 Act applies (waters owned or managed by the British Waterways Board) unless—

(a) the application for the licence was accompanied by the prescribed evidence that notice of the application was served on the British Waterways Board; and

(b) the Authority has considered any representations or objections made by that Board within the period of twenty-eight days beginning with the day on which the application was made or such longer period as the Authority may allow.'.

No. 77, in page 320, line 24, after 'sections', insert 'and Part II of the said Act of 1965'.

No. 30, in page 321, line 40, at end insert—

'. The repeal by this Act of the Drought Act 1976 shall not affect—

(a) any order under that Act which is in force immediately before the transfer date;

(b) any power to make an order under that Act on an application (whether made before, on or after that date) of which notice was given before that date; or

(c) the operation of the provisions of that Act in relation to any such order or application;

but, in relation to any time on or after that date, that Act and anything done under it shall have effect by virtue of this paragraph as if references to a water authority were references to the successor company of that water authority.'.

No. 7, in page 323, line 25, at end insert—

'(4) Nothing in this Act shall be construed as preventing so much of any order under section 28(3) of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 or of any licence under Part I of Schedule 3 to that Act as—

(a) is in force immediately before the transfer date; and

(b) has the effect for the purposes of section 6 of that Act (prohibition on placing and use of unauthorised fixed engines) of authorising the placing or use of any fixed engine,

from continuing to have that effect on and after that date.'.

No. 87, in page 327, line 33 at end insert—

'Transitory provision relating to rating

.—(1) In relation to the period beginning with the transfer date and ending with 31st March 1990, the provisions of section 31 of and Schedule 4 to the General Rate Act 1967 (valuation of water hereditaments) shall have effect—

(a) as if references in those provisions to any statutory water undertakers or to their undertaking included references to a water undertaker or to the undertaking of a water undertaker;

(b) as if the successor company of a water authority were the same person in law as the water company; and

(c) as if any hereditament which—

(i) is occupied on and after that date by the Authority; and

(ii) was occupied, immediately before that date, by a water authority for the purposes of their functions with respect to the supply of water, were a water hereditament occupied by that water authority's successor company for the purposes of the company's functions (as a water undertaker) with respect to the supply of water.

(2) Where any hereditament allocated to the Authority by a scheme under Schedule 2 to this Act will fall on and after the transfer date to be treated for the purposes of the provisions mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above as occupied by a successor company, that scheme may require the Authority to make payments to the successor company, of such amounts and at such time as may be determined in accordance with the scheme, by way of contributions in respect of any liability of the successor company in consequence of those provisions.

(3) In relation to the period mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above, section 43 of the said Act of 1967 (exemption of property of certain authorities) shall have effect, subject to that sub-paragraph, as if the references in that section to a water authority and to a drainage authority included references, respectively, to the Authority and to an internal drainage board.'.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Schedule 24

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 8, in page 339, line 33, column 3, leave out '5,' and insert '1 to'.

No. 38, in page 346, leave out lines 26 to 30.—*[Mr. Ridley.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—*[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, and Prince of Wales's consent, on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall, signified.]*

6.12 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Out of the three days for the remaining stages of this Bill, the Opposition have chosen to use a quarter of the time on the Third Reading. On this occasion I think they were right: they completely failed to fault the Bill in Committee and the details were found to be correct. My hon. Friends, the two Ministers of State and the two Under-Secretaries of State, totally dominated the argument throughout the Committee stage. On Third Reading, we come back to the big issue of principle: the advantages of privatising the water supply and sewerage industries.

We had scare stories and diversionary tactics galore —everything from turnstiles on national park walks to my alleged row with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister; from our proposals for price control for water companies that were alleged to be leading to huge monopoly price rises, to the cost of environmental improvements that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) alleged was due to privatisation. They were all nonsense—fictitious fig leaves to disguise the real reason for opposing the Bill: which is the lingering spirit of clause 4, the Labour party's antagonism to private enterprise, the pain and despair at seeing the Socialist state not only demolished but debunked in argument.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) gave the game away a fortnight ago today when I intervened to ask her, if she wanted to see a major clean-up of our rivers, why she opposed the Bill? She did not have an answer, she fumbled and could only repeat her opposition to privatisation. The Committee stage has proved that there is no reason for opposing this Bill, other than the emotional one that somehow water is different, that it is vital to life, and is provided by the Almighty. I shall therefore spend a few minutes discussing that incontrovertible observation.

Yes, water is vital to life; but so is food, and housing and clothing, and many other things, too. Yet nobody suggests we should emulate the Russian system of collective farming and state food shops, which is the way the public sector provides for that staple of life which is food. Primitive man privatised food supplies, and so does civilised man. I will not attempt to answer for Ashdown man who has taken no part in the debates.

Nor do I recommend the Socialist clothing shops to those aspiring countrymen of ours who clearly prefer Marks and Spencer. Nor do I recommend the Socialist provision of state housing. Even the Labour party knows that people prefer home ownership. But clothing and housing are staples of life, far better provided—does anyone disagree?—by the private sector.

So what is so special about water? It is a natural monopoly, yes, but that is catered for in the regulatory arrangements that we are making. I would remind the House that it is not the water itself which we are proposing to privatise, but the impounding, piping, pumping, treatment, maintenance and billing of it—the industrial activity essential for its provision. Morever, we mortals dirty it. It has to be taken from our houses and purified, treated, pumped, piped and finally disposed of. Listening to Opposition Members, I sometimes think that they believe that it is the Tories who create sewage. I plead guilty to the fact that Tories do create 44 per cent. of it —our latest opinion poll rating—but that means that 40 per cent. is Labour, 12 per cent. Liberal/SDP and 4 per cent. do not know.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that 96 per cent. of those who took part in a recent opinion poll on water privatisation and who assist in the production of sewage were against his Government's proposals?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot accept that figure. The poll that I have quoted is the one the hon. Gentleman should bear in mind, instead of making such an unfelicitous intervention.

The fact is that 42,000 people are employed in the provision of our water and sewerage services. Unfortunately, the Almighty does not pay their wages; nor does He provide the capital for the massive increase in environmental standards which this Bill will usher in. That is why water is not free, and never can be.

The question is, how can this massive human enterprise be best motivated; and how can this large amount of other people's savings best be harnessed to the improvement works that everyone wants to see?

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us agree with him that we dislike state monopolies, which is why many of us voted for much of the privatisation that has taken place throughout this Government's period in office? If I dislike state monopolies, which in the end are controlled by the State, why should I like private monopolies that in the end are often against the public interest? What is so good about a private monopoly and what is so awful about a state monopoly, as with water where people have nowhere else to go to, as there is only one supplier?

Mr. Ridley: I do not know whether my hon. Friend supported the Government when they privatised the airports, British Telecom and British Gas——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Yes.

Mr. Ridley: Those are all monopolies, too.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: They are not.

Mr. Ridley: They are. There is no way of coming to London without going to Heathrow or Gatwick, which are both under the same ownership.

These are the questions that are relevant to the Bill and which the Opposition shirk. I shall give them the answers. The whole country knows that people work more effectively if there is every opportunity for them to better themselves by better performance. In the private sector, water managers, foremen and employers will profit from success, and I hope that they will own shares which will then rise in value as these people succeed. In the private sector, capital which is borrowed from the market or from shareholders will be invested with all the efficiency and skill that those who are responsible to their shareholders have to demonstrate. Moreover, that capital will not be rationed as it is in public sector industries: it will be allocated by the market, if a water company can show a proper rate of return.

We all know what happens with capital rationing in the state sector. Under the Opposition, capital spending was cut by a third, and investment in sewerage within that by a half. That is the albatross of which the Labour party will never be able to rid itself in these debates, and it continues powerfully to make the case for privatisation.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Talking of capital and shares, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm something with which I charged him on Second Reading and which I believe still stands? This capital will be available for diversification virtually without limitation. It will be open to the worldwide capital market, and the water companies can be controlled, bought and sold on that market without the control of the Government. Will the Minister confirm that that is true?

Mr. Ridley: I was talking about loan capital, but I presume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to equity. I very much hope that the world loan markets will be available. That will mean that we can obtain the cheapest loan money for the environmental improvements that are required.

As to shares limitations, the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well what we have said will be the position in relation to golden shares. He also knows perfectly well what we have said will be our policy towards mergers and monopolies. That policy was discussed in Committee, and I believe it to be right.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said a fortnight ago:

"I am willing to set out all the answers to all those questions in a speech which I shall be making in a few weeks time."

He is waiting until the debate is over before telling us his policy.

"I agree that these things will cost money, and a great deal of money, and that the British people will need to pay. I also believe, that, overwhelmingly, they are willing to pay. It is not necessary to sell off the nation's water resources to achieve these objectives."—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1989; Vol. 149, c.969.]

I agree with the first part, but it is necessary to sell off the nation's water resources to achieve these objectives.

The truth is, as Labour proved for us when in power, that the person who regulates an industry must be separate and different from the person who provides the service —hence the National Rivers Authority, which will be able to ensure proper standards without financial penalty to itself. It provides a far more satisfactory framework for setting national standards for the industry than has even been achieved while the industry has been owned by the public sector.

The Opposition have only to look at the proposals for customer service standards and price control, and for quality of drinking water, and at the framework for setting and achieving higher standards for river and coastal water. Those standards were never set, let alone achieved, when they were in office.

As a result of the Bill, standards will, for the first time, be clear, public, objective and measurable. The industry will have no option but to comply with them, because to do otherwise can lead to fines and, in the last analysis, to loss of appointment. When compliance cannot be achieved immediately, there will be a clear and explicit understanding of the steps to be taken to achieve compliance. The Bill is the biggest step forward for the environment since the time when the Opposition were only a gleam in Keir Hardie's eye. The creation of the NRA and the privatisation of the utilities is the only way to secure the environmental improvements to water quality and to the beaches and rivers that we all want. This will be coupled with a system of price regulation which will protect the consumer from exploitation by the monopoly.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Minister has spoken of the great price benefits for consumers of privatisation. Will he explain why the existing private statutory water companis have increased their prices by so much and attributed the increase to privatisation? Will he explain how it can be that his former hon. Friend Lord Elliott of Morpeth has told me in a letter that one of the three reasons for the 18·5 per cent. increase by the Newcastle and Gateshead water company is privatisation legislation, because it will change its financial regime from that of a statutory company to that of a plc? Surely the noble Lord is telling the truth?

Mr. Ridley: I do not accept for one moment that the reason for the increase in water companies' charges, which averages 22 per cent., is necessarily right and justified—I do not have the bill. Secondly, I am certain the increases have nothing to do with privatisation——

Mr. Beith: The companies say that they have.

Mr. Ridley: Without the powers in the Bill enabling the director general to examine the books and to set a limit on price rises, and to check that they are due to environmental improvements, how can anyone possibly say whether these prices rises were justified?

Secondly, there is no way in which the privately owned statutory water companies can be privatised, so the increases cannot be due to privatisation, whatever the noble Lord says.

Thirdly, it is true that the existing structure of control of dividends and of that which can be put to reserve has starved those private companies of equity capital and forcing them to rely far too much on loan capital. On the

basis of that analysis, they have been failing to renew their assets and get their acts right. They would inevitably have to make changes as a result of moving to a proper balance sheet structure.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Does the Secretary of State recall holding up the statutory water companies as paragons of virtue on Second Reading and describing them as examples of how the water industry should be managed, operated and run? Why, now that this has all blown up in his face, are the companies overwhelmingly, if not universally, blaming the Bill for large increases in water prices? Is he calling them dishonest? What has happened?

Mr. Ridley: What the hon. Gentleman said was not true; he should consult *Hansard* before making those accusations. I did not hold up the companies as paragons of financial virtue. I said that they had supplied water in the private sector to 25 per cent. of the population for many decades, and the hon. Gentleman had never noticed or objected.

Secondly, I made it clear that the environmental improvements and the change in capital structures required for this massive investment would apply to all water companies as well as the water authorities. I have never disguised for one moment that the effect of the environmental improvements which the whole House wants will be an increase in prices.

Mr. Allan Roberts: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Ridley: I have just given way to the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend, but I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Roberts: On what environmental improvements will the statutory water companies spend such large amounts after privatisation which they are not spending money on now—bearing in mind that they will still have no responsibility for sewage?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman until the Director General of Water Supplies is in place—the hon. Gentleman voted against part II, which sets up the office of director general. How can anybody know how to regulate a price if there are not the powers to obtain the necessary information?

The attitude of the hon. Gentleman is absurd. He might like to know that the Director General of Water Services, whose appointment I announced today, will do more to promote efficiency and customer interest than was ever achieved when this monopoly was in the public sector.

So why do the Opposition oppose it? That is the question which the Opposition cannot answer and I will tell them why they cannot answer it. It is because at least one half of the Labour party have painfully, unhappily, belatedly come to realise that we are right. I quote from the second leak of the Labour party's policy in *The Times* of yesterday:

"Under proposals which will be fought by left-wing unions and politicians only British Telecom, of all the utilities privatised by the Conservatives, would be taken back into public ownership under a Labour government."

[Interruption.] Wait for it; the hon. Gentleman has a gem coming here.

"Instead, the gas, water and electricity industries would be subjected to a tighter regulatory framework than at present imposed on gas and Telecom. Plans to take permanent government stakes in strategic companies have also been shelved."

Since this Bill contains that tighter regulatory framework which they seek, the Opposition have conceded the principle both of part I and of part II of the Bill. There is nothing left for them to stand on. I rest my case there. There is no longer any reason for Labour Members to stay even until 10 o'clock. The Opposition are not going to vote against this—but I hope that my hon. Friends will stay on until 10 o'clock, just in case. I am happy to assure hon. Gentlemen that their own party policy, which I am sorry that they have not been told about, utterly supports the Bill. I therefore commend it to the House.

6.34 pm

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State began with what appeared to be a joke when he described what had been happening in the Water Bill Committee for the last four months. He is either a victim of the Minister for Water and Planning's doctoring of the reports from the Department of the Environment or he simply has not been reading the newspapers during that time. If he blissfully believes that his ministerial colleagues have won all the arguments and convinced the British public of the effectiveness of his proposals he is living in cloud-cuckoo-land. Judging by the remainder of his speech, that is exactly where he has been for the last four months.

The Bill has been under scrutiny in debate since last December. It remains largely unchanged—that at least is true—but our fundamental criticisms remain, and public antipathy to the proposals continues to increase. The issues have been widely reported in the media and there has been huge public interest in our discussions. The response of the public, the press and the media generally has been overwhelmingly and heavily critical of the right hon. Gentleman's Bill. The Bill remains fundamentally weak, confused and, indeed, incoherent, and the ideas that he had cobbled together fell apart during examination in Committee.

That is not surprising. The Secretary of State began by trying to hide a bad idea by claiming bogus environmental advantages for his Bill, but those bogus claims sank in a sea of his own confusion.

Let us take the right hon. Gentleman's treatment of the pollution issue as a case in point. He said in parliamentary answers that he did not hold centrally information about pollution of our beaches. He could not tell us, he said, how many sewerage works discharged untreated raw sewage into the sea. The Secretary of State for Wales told us that the information was held centrally and he could provide it. That was on 14 March. On 22 March, the Secretary of State was able to tell the House that about 14 per cent. of sewage from England and Wales was discharged into the seas untreated. Miraculously, in two weeks, this information, which he said was not held centrally, had suddenly appeared.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: In a moment. I am referring to the right hon. Gentleman's comments in column 1081 of the *Official Report* of Wednesday 22 March. The Prime Minister, in the meantime, goes on television and tells the British public that no untreated sewage is discharged into the seas around Britain.

[Dr. Cunningham]

Here we have the kind of confusion about these issues that is rampant in the Government. The Secretary of State for Wales contradicts the Secretary of State for the Environment; the Secretary of State for the Environment contradicts himself; and the Prime Minister contradicts everybody.

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman has made an awful mess of this one. The first question that he asked was how many outfalls there were in England. We do not have that information. Some of them are tiny. They do not have that information in Wales. That is the first point. When the hon. Gentleman asked a sensible question to which I had the answer—the 14 per cent.—I gave it to him immediately. He must not get mixed up between the two things.

Dr. Cunningham: The Secretary of State is further confused, because it was not I who asked the second question; it was another hon. Member. It is passing strange that the Secretary of State says that he does not know how many outfalls pass untreated sewage into the sea, but he can give a percentage figure of how much sewage goes untreated into the sea. How does he arrive at the calculation? How has he come to that conclusion?

The Secretary of State caused further confusion when he publicly abandoned his statutory duty to protect the environment by promising, on the record, that the cosseted private monopolies he wants to create would have immunity from prosecution if they polluted the water environment. The Secretary of State has tried to disguise the scale and nature of the problems by hiding the truth, as I have shown by the example I have just given. One week he cannot tell us the facts and the next week, when it suits his purpose, he has some facts.

Let us come to the issue of the land assets, which has been such a bone of contention throughout our discussions. We know that the potential development and sale of 500,000 acres of land is one of the sweeteners which the Secretary of State is pushing towards the City and purchasers. The Minister for Water and Planning made that clear in his letter of 6 February to Mr. Jack Jeffery of the statutory water companies, when he said that the water companies, after privatisation, should offset costs by "proceeds of asset sales"—in other words, by selling their land.

What is happening now, in anticipation of all this? I have here a copy of an advertisement by the Mid Southern water company explaining its reasons for increasing charges to its consumers. It says quite candidly that it had been seeking planning permission for some of its land and with such permission could have raised £1 million, which could have been used to offset price increases. Unhappily for the company—but happily for us and for the environment—planning permission was refused.

When we debated all these matters in committee we were told by the Under-Secretary and the Minister for Water and Planning on several occasions that there were some "good arguments here". The Secretary of State replied to these matters recently when he was in Thirlmere in Cumbria in the Lake district. He claimed in his statement that his proposals would protect our national heritage. A newspaper report said:

"The Council for National Parks said yesterday that Mr. Ridley's measures simply did not go far enough to be effective. While we are delighted that the water authorities will have to consult the National Parks, there is no requirement for them to take any notice whatever of what the parks say".

That is the limit of the safeguard about which the right hon. Gentleman has been boasting. The chairman of the council for the Protection of Rural England, Mr. David Astor, described the decision to leave the consultation over planning and development with private monopoly companies as "incredible". He said that it was

"opening the floodgates for unprecedented abuse and distortion."

Mr. Astor was speaking about planning and land development. That is the kind of confusion that the right hon. Gentleman is causing by his proposals for selling much of the national park areas.

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the private water undertakings will be able to take no notice of planning determinations by the national park authority? Secondly, in what respect are the safeguards offered by my right hon. Friend any less effective than those currently available to control the activities of public water undertakings?

Dr. Cunningham: The very fact of passing the undertakings into private monopoly hands is enough to emphasise that point. Of course private water undertakings will not be able to ignore the decisions of planning authorities. I spend much time talking to people who manage national parks because my constituency is in such a park. If the hon. Gentleman talked to such people he would know that the pressure on national parks is huge and in some cases is overwhelming the authorities. They feel that controls and oversight should be strengthened and not weakened as proposed in the Bill.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Cunningham: No.

Those arguments have been advanced not just by Opposition parties but by influential and well-informed organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, the National Trust, the Countryside Commission and the Ramblers Association. They all express concern similar to ours and it has all been contemptuously dismissed by Tory Members who just ploughed on and voted down amendment after amendment. All major attempts to strengthen environmental safeguards and to protect our heritage have been rejected by the Government and their supporters in Committee. Privatisation is at best irrelevant to enhanced environmental protection and at worst positively disastrous and damaging.

The Bill and Conservative intentions are a betrayal of water consumers, of every family and household in England and Wales. The Secretary of State says that consumers will be safeguarded and has been dismissive of statements by chairmen of statutory water companies. The West Kent water company was one of the first in the field with a price increase of 42 per cent. In its statement to consumers it says that half the price increase—21p in the pound—was to meet privatisation requirements.

The Eastbourne statutory water company issued a notice on 27 February. The chairman's statement said:

"The year 1988 has been significant for the effect of the Government's Policy of 'Privatisation' of the Water Industry and the very considerable increase in the work load placed on our staff, together with the considerable additional burden of

employing consultants, the cost of which is having to be met by our consumers, and which is likely to continue for some time. This additional cost is responsible for at least half of the increase in our charges from 1st January, 1989 and also partially responsible for the very considerable reduction in the surplus for 1988 compared with 1987. What is depressing is that I cannot foresee any worthwhile advantage to our consumers emanating from these Government proposals."

This year those consumers face an increase of 43 per cent. in their water charges as a result, in large measure, of the Secretary of State's proposals.

The chairman of the Eastbourne statutory water company continued:

"I have never disguised my opinion that Privatisation is completely unsuitable for the Water Industry and I am extremely disillusioned by the Government's disadvantageous treatment of Statutory Water Companies, particularly in preventing them achieving PLC status until well after the Water Authorities. Civil Service and Government protestations of their intention to provide 'a level playing field' are totally hypocritical. The playing field is just about as level as the North Face of the Eiger."

In December, the people running these organisations were being lauded in the Chamber as examples of the way in which the industry could and should be run.

What of Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes, a former Conservative Minister? Is she to be believed when the chairmen of statutory water companies are no longer to be believed? In a letter to me in February announcing the publication of a National Consumer Council book entitled "In the absence of competition", she said:

"As you will see my Council believes that the proposed regulatory framework for both water and electricity falls short of what is actually required."

The book says:

"If the consumer interest is to be protected in the water industry, some kind of national body for water consumers is essential."

We moved such an amendment in Committee but it was rejected by Ministers and Government Back Benchers. The book goes on:

"The proposals appear to be so complex as to raise serious doubts as to their viability."

The National Consumer Council criticises and condemns the right hon. Gentleman's proposals. The document of his own departmental working group, a copy of which I have here and which is headed "Department of the Environment, 3 March 1989"—the report of the joint privatisation regulation group; civil servants in the Department of the Environment—shows what is happening.

Page 2 says that the aim is to provide that the private monopolies

"are permitted to earn a reasonable return, the secondary duty to consumers means that lower rather than higher 'Ks' should always be set."

The secondary duty and not the primary duty is to consumers. That is what the right hon. Gentleman's civil servants area saying in private and it is quite different from what the right hon. Gentleman says in public.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): The hon. Gentleman quoted the words of Mr. C. P. G. Turner, the chairman of the Eastbourne statutory water company. From what he read out, I understood Mr. Turner to be saying that he as the chairman of a statutory water company envied privatised water authorities and wanted his company to be in that position. He seemed to be envying the private companies and that is exactly contrary to the hon. Gentleman's point. Instead of dealing with the opinions of other people, will the hon. Gentleman tell us the position of the Labour party on this matter?

Dr. Cunningham: I will happily send the hon. Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) a copy of the whole statement of the chairman of the Eastbourne water company and he can consider it for himself.

On page 3 of the internal document of the Secretary of State's Department, we read:

"On the basis of these figures, a real return for water and sewerage undertakers . . . of the order of 8 per cent. would seem appropriate."

Ministers are preparing to guarantee private monopolies a return of 8 per cent. That contrasts starkly with what the right hon. Gentleman says about local authorities running their direct labour organisations where he recommends a rate of return of 5 per cent. So it is 5 per cent. for local authorities' direct labour organisations while he is planning to arrange for 8 per cent. for private water monopolies. This is an interesting document. It gives a very different picture of events and discussions in private in the Department from what we had in Committee. It goes on to discuss cost pass through. Cost pass through is a little water pipe, a conduit of its own, which bypasses all the controls set to protect the consumer so that the cosseted private enterprise monopoly will be able to cost pass through straight to the consumer.

What does cost pass through mean? It is a euphemism for uncontrolled price increases which consumers will be unable to avoid. That is what is going on behind the scenes. The Secretary of State may deny it, but here is a copy of a document from his Department dated 3 March 1989 and headed: "A framework and procedures for K-setting".

The Minister for Water and Planning (Mr. Michael Howard): Why is the hon. Gentleman seeking to mislead the House? If he has studied the provisions of the Bill he ought to know that cost pass through is subject to the control of the Director General of Water Services, and that it is designed to deal only with unforeseeable matters, such as new regulatory requirements. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the companies should be in a position to meet the new regulatory requirements or not?

Dr. Cunningham: Of course they ought to be in a position to meet them. They will have to meet them. They will have no choice. At least, that is what the European Commission believes. I am not sure that the Secretary of State believes that from what he has been saying and the way he has been behaving.

What we need to know from the Government and from the Minister for Water and Planning, who will have the opportunity to tell us when he replies to the debate, is exactly how consumers will be protected from cost pass through. There is nothing in the Bill about it. There is no statutory safeguard in the legislation to protect consumers from cost pass through. Cost pass through will be used to cover a multitude of sins to enable private monopolies to load price increases on to consumers. That is what is proposed.

Mr. Howard: I know that the hon. Gentleman could not attend the Committee frequently. Has he heard of the Director General of Water Services? If he had heard of the Director General of Water Services he would know that

[Mr. Howard]

the cost pass through provisions are subject to regulation by the Director General of Water Services. Will the hon. Gentleman accept that?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not accept that. It is indicative of the depths to which the Minister stoops when he is in trouble. He knows that I attended the overwhelming majority of Committee sittings. He also knows that his right hon. Friend had not got the guts to go on the Committee at all. If we are trading attendances and attention to these matters, I can tell the Minister that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is nowhere in that argument because he did not even go on to the Committee. If that is the kind of argument that the Minister wants to have over the Dispatch Box, he is welcome to it. There was not a single attendance at the Committee by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Howard: He was not a member.

Dr. Cunningham: That is right; he was not a member. He refused to put himself up to be cross-examined about the mess. That is the record of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Dr. Cunningham: In view of all this, it is a pity that the Secretary of State has not departed, as I understood he was to do, from these proceedings to attend the christening of his grandson, which certainly I would have understood. His performance and that of the Minister of Water and Planning have not done much to enlighten the House or the public about this mess of legislation.

Mr. Ridley: I just wish to ask the hon. Gentleman if he would kindly reply to my hon. and learned Friend's question about whether he understood that the Director General of Water Services is enabled to deny cost pass through if he thinks that it is not justified. Will the hon. Gentleman withdraw his failure to understand the Bill, because he has got it wrong?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not withdraw anything. I do not accept that as the legislation stands, consumers will be adequately protected from cost pass through, and neither do Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes and many other people who are interested in the protection of consumers, as has been made abundantly clear over the last few weeks.

Major differences of opinion between the Government and the European Commission also remain over exemption from pollution law, water quality standards, timetables for essential investment and the scale of such investment. It is in Britain that the confused, inefficient and dogmatic Tory proposals will be rejected, if not in their Lordships' House or in the City, ultimately at elections. Obdurate Tory insistence on making water supply and sewage disposal an issue of private profit is anathema to the majority of British people.

Samuel Johnson, the 18th century satirist, had a very apt description for the Government and for Tory Back Benchers in his work, "The Vanity of Human Wishes":

"How rarely reason guides the stubborn choice, rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant voice; How nations sink, by darling schemes oppressed."

This idea is one of the Prime Minister's darling schemes and the British people will certainly be oppressed by it. The Government will ultimately sink and these proposals will sink with them.

I have been asked about our position and a leak in *The Times* which was news to me and was not the matter that I have been involved in discussing. I do not believe the quoted leak in *The Times*. I reiterate what I have said throughout the proceedings: water is the country's largest national and natural monopoly. It is the people's most fundamental resource, on which their health and well-being depend. We in the Labour party believe that this natural resource and the assets of the water industry should be publicly owned and controlled. They should be managed openly and efficiently in the public interest, and management should be democratically accountable at regional and national level. Unlike the Tories, we do not believe that an essential resource such as water should be managed and sold for private gain. For us, public health and hygiene are not matters which can be dealt with by market forces. We know that the overwhelming majority of the British people share our values and views in this matter. That is why we will vote against the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. In view of the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I ask for brief contributions.

6.59 pm

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): I will do my utmost to obey your injunction, Mr. Speaker. That excuses me from saying very much about the speech made by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) except to make two points. First, in my experience in the House or in Committee, bad temper is not a substitute for good argument. Secondly, it does not appear to me to follow, although it may follow for the hon. Member for Copeland, that there must be public ownership for public control. The hon. Gentleman should think a little more about the subject before he outlines Labour party policy on such matters in future.

I support the Bill, and I believe that most of my constituents do the same. My constituents have been fortunate enough over a great many years to draw their drinking water from private suppliers and I have never had any complaints about that. Given that the much vaunted percentage increases about which we have heard so much this evening will still keep the average household's water cost to about the same as the cost of a national daily newspaper each day, keeping things in proportion, I do not believe that there will be as many complaints about costs as we have been led to believe, particularly in view of the powers to control prices in future which are rightly embodied in the Bill.

I confess that I have received complaints about the drains, as have many of my colleagues. In my constituency complaints are directed against the Thames water authority, which is not a privately owned body. That authority is currently polluting the River Wey in my constituency in a most deplorable way. The local angling association shares my view about that.

In general I have no doubt that the fight against pollution will be made easier and more effective by the Bill. The duty to fight pollution will unmistakably be present,

as will the money. The Treasury will not be able to stop that money, there will be no unseemly wrangles in the Star Chamber and the IMF will be unable to prevent the necessary investment in water quality as it did during the days of the late unlamented Labour Government. That is an important distinction which we should not cease to emphasise. The plcs will be able to raise the funds that they need and in a few years we stand the excellent chance of having many more rivers to be proud of once again. That would not have happened if the Government had not introduced this Bill.

We must never forget human frailty, and we can never forecast it. It will remain possible, under this Bill or under any other legislation, for accidents, neglect or greed to create pollution in future just as they have done in the past. That means that the powers of inspection and enforcement which will be invested in the NRA will be absolutely vital. In its use of those powers, the NRA will have the support and active co-operation of anglers throughout the country, who, after all, spend more time than anyone else on river banks and are much the best inspectors of water quality in our rivers.

I am also glad to know that the public right to prosecute will remain in law. If that right is to be used properly, the law must be effective and help the public enforce their rights in addition to enforcement by the NRA.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning felt that my amendment No. 86 to clause 143 was unnecessary. He has written to several of my hon. Friends explaining his views. In his letter he states:

"The Bill as drafted already meets the requirements"

which the amendment seeks to achieve because—and I do not deny this—

"it will be open to anyone to bring a prosecution over the pollution of 'controlled waters' . . . including prosecutions for breaches of the conditions attached to consents granted by the National Rivers Authority for the discharge of trade and sewage effluent . . .

Second, the NRA as the body statutorily responsible for effluent discharge consents will have to use its powers under the clauses . . . to enter premises and sample effluent discharges in a systematic manner to ensure that the conditions of the consents are being met. Where a sample suggests that a consent requirement is being breached in a manner which could give grounds for prosecution, we would normally expect the NRA to start taking formal samples in accordance with Clause 143. But since the circumstances of each case will vary, it would be inappropriate to deny the Authority discretion as to whether this is appropriate in a particular case, and as to the number of occasions on which the taking of a formal sample is necessary. For that reason we could not support the particular amendment . . . But the Authority will have a clear obligation to take such number of formal samples as permits full and effective enforcement of the legislation, and the Secretary of State will have the power . . . to direct the Authority on how to discharge this obligation."

So far, so good. However, in my capacity as a member of the council of the Angler's Co-operative Association which has initiated several prosecutions in this area, I must say that we are by no means convinced that my hon. Friend the Minister is right.

Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, provision was made to establish public registers of discharge analyses. The relevant section of that Act was implemented in July 1985, as my hon. Friend the Minister no doubt remembers. Since then, the Angler's Co-operative Association has used information from the registers to prosecute water authorities on three occasions. The authorities concerned were Thames and Anglian. On one of the occasions the Thames water authority was prosecuted on eight separate charges, to which it pleaded guilty, and on each of which it was fined £1,000. The outcome of the other cases was much the same.

At the moment, the ACA would like to take a similar action against a fish farmer on the Hampshire Avon. I believe the proprietors are the Radnor estates and the farm is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I hope I will have his support when I make this point.

The public register shows that that fish farm is at times in breach of conditions. However, the Wessex water authority declines to prosecute the polluter. The ACA cannot prosecute because the samples taken by the water authority are only for monitoring purposes. Therefore, for that purpose, the register is not worth the paper that it is written on. We cannot launch a common law action because it would be necessary to trespass to obtain formal samples.

The Government claim that the right of private individuals to prosecute will remain. However, that right must be effective. In future, samples will be taken by the NRA and their validity may be challenged. However, more to the point, the NRA may lack the will to prosecute, as has been the case with the Wessex water authority.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My right hon. Friend knows that for many years we have both been keen to ensure the quality of the Hampshire Avon. If we look at this question very carefully, it seems to me that under the new arrangements the vital difference is that the evidence under the formal NRA sampling exercise can be subpoenaed by a third party. In those circumstances, the Angler's Co-operative Association could undertake a private prosecution under this Bill.

Mr. Onslow: I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can confirm that my hon. Friend is right. However, the important point is to take the samples. That is the necessary step towards a successful prosecution. My amendment sought to place a duty on the authority to take the samples.

The situation is one where the anglers have their doubts about such matters. Lawyers, no doubt, see everything with greater certainty. However, the people who will be taking the samples will be the same people as today, and there is to our minds little guarantee, given that the NRA will have a discretion, that we can necessarily rely on getting samples of quality and type necessary for a successful prosecution. Whatever view other people may take of the chances of success at law, the ACA is not in the business of frivolous litigation and goes to court only when it has the evidence which will make it possible to win and it is confident that it will win. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would touch on that point in his reply.

The Central Council for Physical Recreation also has reservations, and I expect my hon. Friend will have seen a letter sent to his hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) by the CCPR on 22 March about the code of practice. Without going into that at length, I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give the House some assurance on how the Secretary of State intends to ensure that water undertakers comply with the code of practice and the maintenance of existing recreations, which some people fear may be at risk. Of course, if we cannot get assurances tonight because of lack of time, there will be an

[Mr. Onslow]

opportunity to return to these matters in another place, and perhaps then the Government will explain why they found my amendment No. 80 so unattractive the other night.

I find it difficult to believe that the NRA does not want to be responsive or flexible and is not prepared to have the opportunity to delegate some of its powers, and I find it odd that there should be resistance to this from the Department without our necessarily being told what the view of the NRA is. In this legislation we are creating an important body, and we should spell out the duties we expect it to perform in this area, and on the question of abstraction, which also causes concern.

I am anxious, as I said, to be brief, and I have little more to say except to question the realism of the statements made by the hon. Member for Copeland about the assets of the water authorities and the extent to which they might be turned to private profit. I do not believe there is a prospect of mass asset-stripping or great areas of land being sold at a profit. However, I believe there is one asset nobody has so far identified which is capable of being exploited and which we should all wish to see exploited, and that is the physical access this industry enjoys to every property which it serves. That access does not, it seems to me, have to be used either to pipe water in or to pipe sewage out.

There is little doubt in my mind that an asset of that kind could be used in other ways of profit and value to the community. It is not impossible that it could be used in such a way as to provide competition in information business technology with British Telecom, and I think we might very well see new owners, enterprising people, taking an opportunity which has been available to our own companies for far too long without being noticed—though I suspect the French have noticed it. I hope entrepreneurs in our own country will take it up and that it will be used to the value of the customers of the water industry.

I have no doubt that this is a necessary Bill, and I believe that it should have the support of the House and of the country.

7.15 pm

Mr. Livsey: The Water Bill is the ultimate folly of a Government hell-bent on imposing their dogmatic will on a long-suffering British public. The time has long since passed when we can appeal with any sense of reason to members of the Government, whose misuse of their parliamentary majority is now virtually complete.

What does this Bill do? Part II replaces the 10 public monopolies in England and Wales with 10 private monopolies, the plcs, and they will indeed be ring-fenced in their own areas; in part I of the Bill a National Rivers Authority will be created, which will remain in the public sector. That is the basis of the Bill. The water so essential for life itself will not remain a public utility, even though the Government's Victorian predecessors thought that was right. Indeed, it was the Government's predecessors in my party who put the water industry into the public sector in the first place. Water, indeed, is essential for life itself, which makes it a natural public utility, yet it is not to remain a public utility.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Gentleman implies that public ownership of water is necessary for the health of the nation and many other factors. Can he explain how people in other countries survive and prosper with private sector water?

Mr. Livsey: Taking the example of France, the price of water is four times higher in some parts of France than in others, and I cannot see that the people there entirely benefit from that situation.

Of course, the reasons why water should clearly remain in the public sector involve the health and social conditions of the people of this country. They should have clean, wholesome and affordable drinking water. Surely these are the basic objectives. The only tenable fallback position, if one could justify it, is the model of the current statutory water companies which presently operate in 25 per cent. of the water industry. They are closely controlled in the public interest and produce affordable water through ploughing back profits to help keep consumers' bills down.

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Livsey: However, the Government have chosen to dismember them and to turn them into plcs instead, already with pre-privatisation increases of 30 to 50 per cent. in the price of water.

The environmental impact of privatisation will affect clean drinking water standards, the disposal of sewage, the cleanliness of beaches and continued access to the half million acres which the present water authorities own.

The Government's reasons for privatising water seem to rest on the following ideological formula. They say that the NRA will control pollution and improve standards; that private investment will bring more money into the industry to clean up drinking water and sewage disposal; that the industry will be freed; that more people will own shares; that the City wishes to invest in the industry, and that the industry will be better regulated.

The facts are that the NRA could be involved just as well as an environmental protection agency if water remained in the public sector. The problem is that the NRA will be under-funded. Indeed, a privatised water industry will only be attractive to the City and to investors if it is made financially attractive, and the only way of doing that is to make consumers pay more for their water than if the industry remained in the public sector. The soundest estimates indicate the price of water will double by 1992.

The other part of the equation is that valuable public assets, such as land, will have to be sold and access charged for. The taxpayer and the consumer will, of course, pay for this. Even if this is done, the City is unlikely to find water an attractive investment, because up to £6 billion will be required to clean up the industry; the maximum sale price is unlikely to be more than £10 billion, so what kind of deal is that for the City? The argument that the industry will be freed by disposing of its debt could equally apply if the water authorities' debts were written off now while the industry remained in the public sector. Our water bills would be a lot cheaper if that were done.

A Director General of Water Services, for regulation purposes, could just as easily have been installed if the industry remained in the public sector, so that argument is demolished too. The thesis that more people will own shares does not reflect recent experience, where it has been shown that most shares still tend to end up in the hands of relatively few people.

The Government have turned water privatisation on its head. They have decided, come what may, to privatise water and have then dug up convenient reasons to try to justify the unjustifiable.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The hon. Gentleman made the interesting point that it was not necessary to privatise the water companies and he implied that it was perfectly possible for NRA to police water authorities maintained in the public sector. Has that proposition any basis in fact? Can the hon. Gentleman name any other area in our society where public bodies can adequately police each other? Is it not a fact that such bodies in the public sector get together cosily and the customer suffers in the end?

Mr. Livsey: The present pollution inspectorate of the water industry would fill the niche that the hon. Gentleman is describing.

The Secretary of State for Wales has said that he would like to see Welsh people owning Welsh Water shares. We would like to see that too. However, there is no sign that that will happen. On 21 March a grand three-helicopter tour of Wales was undertaken by representatives of such well-known Welsh banking forms as Smith Newcourt, Kleinwort Benson, Salamon Brothers, Alexander Lang and Scrimgeour, Cazenove and Company, Citicorp, County NatWest, Shrive Lehman and Company, Phillips and Drew and, just to sweeten the pill, the Cardiff stockbroking firm of Lyddon and Company.

Given the Secretary of State's penchant for public relations, it is strange that such an exercise by Welsh Water was not the subject of headlines in the Welsh media. Perhaps the subject was just a little too sensitive at that time since the Bill was being debated in the House at that moment. I hope that the bankers enjoyed the scenery—97,000 acres represents quite a lot of Wales and quite a lot of Welsh real estate. We know, too, that computers in Scottish banks are already programmed to print Water plc shares. What kind of pre-emption is that? The Bill has not yet completed its progress through the House.

The Government want the Bill to be a truimph of dogma over common sense. We know that water will become unaffordable for many of the poorest in society after privatisation. There is no way that the Government can deny that. There were 9,000 disconnections last year and there will surely be more in the future.

According to the opinion polls, water privatisation is opposed by 75 per cent. or more of the British people, including many Conservative supporters. Make no mistake about it, water privatisation will damage our health. Water privatisation will annexe public assets and give the taxpayers' investment to the wealthy. It will produce a private monopoly with no competition—inexcusable even by Tory standards.

Water privatisation will damage the environment and double the price of consumers' water, hitting the poorest in society. It will cost £842 million just to privatise water and the British people will pay that bill. It will be a poor investment because of its liabilities. Water privatisation will remove the last vestiges of local government democratic representation in the water industry. There will be no public accountability.

Water privatisation is a rotten measure by a Government who have gone several privatisations too far. They will surely pay the political price in the ballot box. God gave the water to the people and the Government are taking it away from them.

7.24 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I do not want to follow the example of the Eisteddfod contribution of the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), but I am prepared to tell my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning that I support the Bill and I have five reasons for doing so.

First, I must pay tribute to the history of the water industry through its many years of municipal undertaking. That is a proud heritage for those of us who represent northern seats where the fine reservoirs produced on the back of the woollen industry are still some of the greatest architectrural achievements of the 19th century. Municipal leadership was a fine contributor to the effectiveness of the British water industry for the first 50 or so years of this century.

There has been a dramatic change, because local authorities and local government have changed. The disappearance of the many utilities in favour of the mega-utilities and local government reorganisation made a fundamental difference to the municipal contact between water supply and the authorities. With that came high-pressure politics of a different kind and a substantial period of neglect for the water utilities. Water had to take its place among municipal priorities, and it was a pretty lowly place as one sees from the total neglect of the reassessment and renewal of assets.

With the development of local government reorganisation came the reorganisation of the water authorities as we have them today. I confess that I remain firmly of the view that the scale of the water authorities as presently constituted is a perfectly effective way of managing water resources. They have the geographical spread to enable the supplies to be most effectively managed. They measure the water cycle as their base. They provide services way beyond the reach of a local authority, even a large one. It is no use in Yorkshire looking back to municipalising the water industry on the basis of the three-county structure and the fourth county of Humberside and a little bit of Cleveland—all of which are within the catchment of the Yorkshire water authority. Municipalisation is not available as an alternative for discussion in the House, although it has played a major part in the handling of the water industry.

Water authorities are within the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, and the Secretary of State has powers to determine their capital allowances, pricing policies and most of the strategies and priorities that the individual authorities would wish to adopt. But we must never forget that they are 10 very different authorities. They are different geographically. They have different resource problems and resource management. They have a different pattern of demand and very different problems of foul water and sewage treatment. They have different demands and patterns of drainage.

That means that they inevitably have different capital demands. They have different priorities and rates of development. All depend on the whim of Government expenditure and Government control. It is that single fact which brings me to my first reason for believing that the

[Sir Giles Shaw]

Bill is right. Until the authorities get outwith the control of Government, they will not be able to manage and develop their assets on a long-term basis without intervention.

The case can be made for central control. In replying to an earlier debate, the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) made it clear that the next Labour Government would take the authorities back into what he loosely termed social ownership public control. But the case for bringing them back into public control by the Government is even thinner than that for going back to municipal control. Surely the water industry must now be recognised for what it is—a modern, effective, well-managed range of public utilities. It is a capital-intensive industry, operating scientifically controlled systems for the distribution of pure water, with a complicated computerised system for cleansing foul water by biological and chemical processes. In addition, it has a high standard of efficiency.

When one thinks that the water industry has had to contend with a rapid growth in demand not only from the ownership of houses and of the developments that that brings but from changes in industrial technologies that require huge uses of water, one would have to be remarkably complacent to argue that the water industry has sold the country short. It has not. It has managed to keep pace with domestic demand created by the washing machine, the car wash, and all the other demands made on the public water supply by domestic consumption, for a daily cost that currently averages 29p to 30p per household, not per person. For that cost to be regarded in 1989 as a significant impost for an amenity that, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor was so keen to argue, is essential, irreplaceable and God-given, is absurd. A cost of 10p per day for each individual is far from high. No one can deny that the water industry has made that possible by its policy of developing new technologies and new effort.

The major argument for privatisation is that it will allow a major service industry that has long outlived its municipal founders and has outgrown its need for central Government constraints to take its place in the private sector. That is the main reason for the Bill, and it is why the Bill deserves, and will have, my support. I do not believe that the statutory water company is a relevant model to the scale of the water authorities, their regional basis, and the range of services that they currently provide. They are not a model for what a locally based statutory company can do. It must differ radically in its management skills and experience, and in the range of the assets that it can produce.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My hon. Friend refers to the great record of water authorities in coping with increased demand arising from developments in certain parts of the country. Does he agree that a connection charge, which is now subject to discussion, would benefit privatised water companies in providing a good service to the consumer and ensure equity between existing consumers and the developers of new housing estates, which would be highly desirable and a fair innovation?

Sir Giles Shaw: I entirely support my hon. Friend. I was glad to note that in a recent speech my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning said that he was still looking for a way of putting such a provision into the Bill. I wish him well. I hope that he will not be put off by the fact that it will be difficult and that officials say that it is impossible. Good political leadership of the kind that I am sure my hon. and learned Friend can provide should see such a measure put in the Bill.

The second reason for privatisation is that it will allow the regional quality of water authorities to develop when they become plcs, providing an important opportunity for regionalisation to take a lead. The regions have their different needs and priorities, and I welcome the prospect of strong regional shareholdings in the regional plcs. I should like to see not only preferential treatment given in the flotation plans to employees and customers, as I am sure is my hon. and learned Friend's view, but a proportion of the stock made available only to regional investing markets, such as Birmingham, Newcastle and Leeds, so that we may ensure that there will be a placement of stock to the benefit of local institutions and companies. Until now, far too little attention has been paid in privatisation to the regional markets. We are presented with a classic opportunity to put that right.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that proper representation of regional interests currently exists but with the Bill as it stands the probability is that, in future, the regions well represented will be foreign and not British. Is that not a valid criticism, and one which argues in favour of the current arrangement being retained?

Sir Giles Shaw: The hon. Gentleman will understand that there is a golden share, which is designed to prevent the development that he mentions. However, I agree with him in principle. I am not one who believes that the Battle of Britain was won on the motto "Per ardua ad Perrier". We should do what we can, by strengthening regional shareholdings, for example, to make it very difficult for French investors to obtain shareholdings in this country.

Ten separate regional businesses will be established, offering a unique and imaginative opportunity that I trust the Government will prosecute vigorously, so ensuring that at least one aspect of water privatisation will have much more public acceptability than at present.

The third reason for privatisation is that it will allow British water management and technology to compete across the world. It is an amazingly large market. In my brief time at the Department of the Environment, I took the first British water mission overseas. We went to the French Cameroons.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): And drank the water there?

Sir Giles Shaw: I recall that the president resigned the first day that I was there.

The French Cameroons desperately needed new technology, because its cities failed to comprehend that most of their population lived below the water level. The overseas market for British technology can be released only after the industry's privatisation. That is exactly what should be done. If we accept EC standards, as we are required to do, it should be recognised that our water industry has developed against a history of fast-flowing rivers for the transportation of drinking water as well as for the disposal of sewage and of foul water. The way in

which continental standards are to be applied seems to ignore our particular aquatic advantages, which we seek to retain.

The fourth reason for privatisation is that it fits extremely well into the Government's policies for its third term of office. Our first term was dedicated to containing inflation, restoring sensible economic policies, and releasing industry and commerce so that it could expand on the basis of competitive quality and price. Managements were given the power to manage, and unions were made accountable to their own members. In our second term, we took great advantage of the public sector by returning it to the private sector, and in industry and in housing there was a massive increase in capital ownership. We have substantially spread the benefits of ownership, and with that has come a greatly reduced demand for tax revenue. Now is the time, in the Government's third term, to tackle major social issues such as health, education, social provision and the environment.

The Government's environmental policies are epitomised by the Water Bill. Only now can we afford evironmental policies of that kind. The environment is one of the most expensive areas in which to legislate and in which to create change. The water environment in particular requires the massive release of resources and an unshackling from the controls that have been applied at a municipal or central Government level in the past. There will be changes in respect of conservation, access and sporting uses, and there will have to be better provision and more flexible policies.

There will undoubtedly be increased costs, in terms not only of the investment that is still required but of ensuring higher standards of river quality, drinking water quality, and of amenities. At a current daily cost of 29p to 30p per household, we are not paying enough for the range of services that we enjoy. I shall be very happy to see increases in water charges, if they bring with them the scale of benefits that I am sure that a new and environmentally sensitive policy will bring.

For something that is as important as water, we should be asking how its price per head compares with the other amenities that the British consumer enjoys. Is 10p per head per day enough? Is that a reasonable price to pay for four or five gallons of water per head? Should it be 12p or 15p? In relation to the cost of other amenities that the consumer currently enjoys, water is excessively cheap. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Hon. Gentlemen may roar, and they are entitled to do that, but there is no doubt that water in this country is cheap and that we are perfectly entitled to say that, given the controls being placed on price by the National Rivers Authority and the director general, some increases will be essential and that we should not try to destroy those increases when they are proposed.

My fifth and final reason is that this has been a commitment that the Government have undertaken for a considerable time. We made it an election commitment the last time we went to the country. It is something which has been worked on for a long time. I am confident that now is the right time to proceed. But if we have confidence in the Bill, I am bound to say that we look to the Government for a further demonstration of their own confidence in the industry.

For example, I am not satisfied with merely a 51 per cent. hold on water privatisation. Why cannot it be 100 per cent., particularly as we now have provision for golden shares and so on? Why cannot 100 per cent. of the water equity be made available? Why confine it to 51 per cent.?

We must also ensure that in the way in which the National Rivers Authority and the director general control the private sector water companies there is a fair relationship between the two. I hope very much that the NRA will not be a large, central, bureaucratic body but will break down into regional authorities and that this regional representation will have a much closer link with the water plcs than is perhaps envisaged in the Bill. If that comes about, as we look to water privatisation being fulfilled, there will be a genuine meeting in the regions between the controllers and companies to see that both get a fair share of the hearing that is necessary before controls are implemented to the disadvantage of either.

All in all, water privatisation is a sensible measure. The Bill is a sensible way of taking it, and I wish it well.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has appealed for brief speeches.

7.41 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I will adhere to Mr. Speaker's request for brevity. As one who represents a north-west constituency and is sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees, which has many thousands of members employed in the water industry, I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) that the Bill ensures that the people have to pay a high price for Tory dogma, because the Bill is part of an ideological crusade and has nothing whatever to do with water quality or efficiency.

After all, this labour-intensive industry has a pretty good productivity record. Productivity has risen by over 33 per cent. in the past decade, yet the cost to the consumer is, on average, six times cheaper than in West Germany and four times cheaper than in France.

Unlike the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) I take great pride in the fact that we produce cheaper water. I hope that the *Pudsey Times* will pick up that bit of his speech to make it clear that he is in favour of higher prices for water. The water industry even exceeded the target rate of return on assets set by the Government last year by a factor of one third.

This is, therefore, an efficient industry, staffed by workers who care for it. So why must the Government meddle with it, force prices up, reduce pollution safeguards and introduce diseconomies of scale by more than doubling the number of water and sewerage authorities? On top of this is the attack on the workers in the industry themselves. I give one clear example—and I hope that the Minister of State is listening.

I was given an assurance in a written answer from the Under Secretary of State that workers would have the right to a pension scheme with the same benefits and contributions as at present. The Under-Secretary of State said:

"existing employees will have the right to remain in a pension scheme with the same benefits, and requiring the same contributions, as the Local Government Superannuation Scheme, of which they are members. Any provisions necessary to secure this position will be included in the legislation to privatise the water authorities."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 1987; Vol. 122, c. *417*.]

[Mr. Tom Pendry]

What do we find in the Bill? Water employees will be able either to keep their existing pension scheme when they move into a new private company or join a new and so-called "improved" scheme. The catch is that the old scheme will have its index-linked benefit removed and the new scheme will not replace it. For the Government to have refused to guarantee the pension benefits accumulated over decades by NUPE and other members is a disgrace. The Minister clearly misled me, the House and, more important, thousands of workers in the industry with that reply in November 1987. Perhaps the Minister, who is now looking to his officials, will tell us why he misled us all on that occasion.

It is clear what sort of water industry we shall be faced with, should this Bill be enacted. It will be one that skimps and muddles through at the expense, not only of consumers, but of water workers as well, because it is clear that the £250 million saved from index-linking will be used to sweeten privatisation.

The changes will be worst of all in the area that some of my colleagues and I represent in the north-west. My region has not only the oldest and most decrepit infrastructure in the country but by far the largest landholding. My constituents will doubly lose out, from a lack of investment and a loss of open land. Of the 150,000 acres of water company land, a substantial proportion is in or next to my own constituency. New, profit-motivated water companies will be under pressure to dispose of land which is declared non-operational. I have no doubt that as soon as water is privatised we shall see vast tracts of unspoilt land declared non-operational and sold for a large profit, a profit which will not be passed on to our constituents by way of cheaper water bills.

The Government claim that recreation will be safeguarded in this Bill, not least by the National Rivers Authority. This is the same National Rivers Authority that the Secretary of State has said should employ as few people as possible. How on earth can a small body with its hands tied keep tabs on pollution discharges, on water quality and on recreational use throughout the country?

It is not, perhaps, surprising that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) is connected with the Bill. After all, he is doing his level best to demolish our national sport of soccer with his ridiculous Football Spectators Bill. As has already been stated in Committee, I would not be surprised, if he has his way, to see turnstiles installed on country walks, cliffs fenced off for use by climbers with ID cards and reservoirs surrounded by barbed wire to stop people fishing. He really ought to listen to his former friends at the Central Council for Physical Recreation. They are particularly worried that their demands for statutory safeguards for recreation have been ignored, particularly in regard to the fate of the 190 reservoirs used for fishing and water sports. The Minister responsible for sport should be ashamed that he was unable to persuade his unsporting boss or bosses of the merits of the CCPR case.

The other place, however, may well come to our rescue, not for the first time, to stop this potentially damaging Bill becoming law. I believe that there is a case to be heard as to whether this Bill is hybrid. I hope that the Government will give considerable thought to that possibility, as will, I am sure, the House of Lords.

My own council of Tameside is investigating a possible loophole in the Bill. My authority has certain historic rights through the ownership of the lordship of the manor of Mottram in Longdendale, an area containing much water authority land. The ownership of this manor and its rights can be traced back to Henry VIII; the rights, which were reserved indefinitely in 1922, include fishing, grazing, wood collection and even turf cutting on the land. These historic rights, bequeathed to the people of the aera, surely cannot be usurped by a private water company. The land was originally removed from a Sir William Stanley, a knight of the area, who was found guilty of high treason. As one who does not believe in capital punishment, I would draw back from suggesting that the Secretary of State and his Ministers should encounter the same fate as Sir William for their part in this treasonable Bill, but they should and will get their come-uppance from the electorate. The Prime Minister, judging from her public utterances on the way in which this measure has been promoted by her Ministers, is only too well aware of that probability.

The Bill will continue to be opposed by Opposition Members as the dangerous, damaging nonsense that it is. More importantly, as every poll shows, it will be opposed by the millions of our electors who believe that water is essential to life itself and must remain a public service.

7.50 pm

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: This Bill is the most recent in a long line of privatisation measures. I agree with privatisation as a philosophy. I think that it is nonsense for the state to own assets for the sake of owning them. That becomes an ideology only when the assets can be sold and used for better purposes. Privatisation of, for instance, British Airways, British Telecom and the Trustee Savings Bank—and in due course, I hope, British Rail and British Coal—is, in my view, acceptable and fair. The sensible criterion applied to all our privatisations so far has been the existence of another source of supply—the existence of competition—and clearly competition will exist following the privatisations of British Coal and British Rail.

I did not understand the Minister—I often do not understand him, although I am sure that that is my loss—when he said that British Gas was a monopoly. Heating can be provided by oil, electricity or even Calor gas. The reason why I have voted for privatisation until now is that I dislike state monopolies, quite apart from not liking the state to tell anyone what he should or should not do. If I dislike state monopolies because they stand astride people's lives, I dislike private monopolies even more. Private sector involvement helps efficiency where there is competition, because a private person needs to make a profit to make investment in the service worth while.

Ministers speak of erecting walls. In the City, Chinese walls were proposed. I do not doubt Ministers' good faith, but private companies will attempt to climb such walls and even to demolish them, and in the main they will succeed. That is the spirit of the animal of free enterprise, and there is nothing wrong with it when competition is there to hold it in check.

With respect to the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), it is not a good argument to say that water comes from Heaven. Unfortunately it does, usually on bank holidays, but that is not an argument for it remaining in the public domain. Water, as we all know,

must be treated, and it costs hundreds of millions of pounds before it reaches our tanks. If state monopolies are to be feared, I tremble before private monopolies. That is why I believe that the Government are wrong, although I have supported them on every privatisation issue until now.

Let me say in all seriousness that the water in Birmingham is not the Government's to sell. Back in the mid-1800s, Joe Chamberlain borrowed tens of millions of pounds because Birmingham's water was foetid, as was most water. By 1850 Birmingham had more direct sewerage and cleaner water than that great empire of the sun in Japan has today. Birmingham's ratepayers were put in hock so that the people could have good water. All the water that we have—in the Elan valley, and everywhere else in Wales—was paid for out of Birmingham ratepayers' money, freely negotiated.

I was chairman of finance when we were discussing what we would do when the Severn-Trent water authority was set up. It was agreed that we would go along with it, but that it would remain under local government control. Now, however, that agreement has been swept aside unilaterally, because we all know that Governments can do what they——

Mr. Ashby: Has my hon. Friend compared the colour of Birmingham's water with that of the water in, for example, London? Has he observed that the water in Birmingham is brown, and has been for about 120 years? That water is in the public sector. Is not the reason the lack of necessary investment over the years, and is that not why this Bill is such a good Bill? Has my hon. Friend not considered the people of Birmingham?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: With the greatest respect, the only reason that I can think of for my hon. Friend's argument that Birmingham's water is brown is that he puts too much whisky in his water. It is patent nonsense. My hon. Friend may get away with conning juries, but he could not get away with conning the people of Birmingham in that way.

We agreed that, as long as it remained under proper control, we would go into the Severn-Trent. Now we are going to sell it off because the Government insist. Quite rightly, if they can get Bills through the House, Governments can do what they will. We feel, however, that much of the money invested at the expense of Birmingham ratepayers needs to be spent to combat some of the problems experienced by Birmingham, as by other cities. If the Government wish to be honest to people, they should recognise that—if cost inflation is taken into account—Birmingham is being robbed of over £500 million of ratepayers' money. That is an incontrovertible fact. This concern is not the Government's to sell. If they insist in bludgeoning such a Bill through the House, they should at least be honourable enough—as I know that they will be in the end—to ensure that Birmingham people at least get back what they invested.

I believe that the Bill is fundamentally flawed. It will be not only flawed but dishonoured if, having broken unilaterally an agreement reached in fairness, we proceed in this way. If the Birmingham ratepayers, who looked after Birmingham's people properly for more than 140 years, find that what we did in honour has been dishonoured by a subsequent Government, I do not think that they will understand—and nor will anyone else who appreciates the ethics of business.

8 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): This House is known throughout the world as the mother of parliaments. As Members, we cherish the example and traditions of our democracy that for centuries Britain has spread throughout the world. Yet today we are debating a Bill which is opposed by at least three quarters of the people of this country.

The polls show that at least three out of every four people oppose this sell-off of water, and nothing that the Government have said, from the time the proposals contained in the measure were first announced, has changed the public's position over the unsoundness of the step that is now being taken.

If the Government had any concern for the wishes of the people, the Bill would have been abandoned long ago. Instead, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) pointed out, complacent in their majority in the House, they have chosen to abandon their responsibility for large sectors of public health and environmental protection inherent in the water industry.

Increasing water pollution in Britain is one of the major concerns of those of us who care about our environment and that of future generations. It is one of those few areas of environmental concern where we can, as a nation, clean up our own backyard without reference to, or co-operation with, other countries. Yet despite their professed concern, the Government have chosen to wash their hands of the responsibility for halting and reducing the gross pollution of our rivers and seas.

No matter how much the Government wriggle and postulate about public spending 15 or 20 years ago, it is a fact that, when the Government introduced external financial limits on the water industry in 1981 and subsequently, they deprived water authorities of the wherewithal to invest adequately in schemes to cope with the pressures of pollution of rivers and seas.

Britain's rivers, the first in the world to be polluted by effluent from sprawling towns and industries during the industrial revolution, governed only by laissez-faire light-handedness, were the first to be cleaned up by public spending and investment. Now they are being fouled again at an unprecedented rate.

About one tenth of our rivers have degenerated to class 3 and 4, being polluted or unable to sustain marine life. The number of cases of river pollution in England and Wales increased last year to 23,000, nearly double the 1982 figure. Obviously, when one third of the nation's drinking water is extracted from those rivers, there is an increased risk to public health, either from the water or from the additives that are put into it to make it safe to drink. Obviously, there is a danger to fish stocks and marine life. Obviously, our environmental heritage and facilities for water-based recreations are being limited.

The Government have responded by increasingly limiting the amount that local authorities can spend to deal with the problem. The Government have reduced their pollution inspectorate, cut funds and opportunities for research and failed to legislate to ensure that polluters pay for their actions.

Now that the EEC has stepped in and said that they must find £1·6 billion to obtain minimum standards of pollution control, the Government have designed a way of selling off that responsibility. The Government can find

[Mr. Gareth Wardell]

£10 billion to repay some of the national debt. They cannot—no, they will not—find £1·6 billion of investment to halt the decline in water quality that they have overseen.

This sell-off of responsibility will be subsidised by all of us. An industry independently valued at £27 billion will be disposed of for between £5 billion and £7 billion. What a gesture. How sweet it must be to operate on such a grand scale. On our behalf, a £20 billion discount is being given —that on behalf of 75 per cent. of the electorate who oppose it.

It is a pity that the grand scale obscures little, nitty-gritty problems that are inherent in the Bill and that would cost little to put right. They would certainly not cost billions of pounds. I refer, for example, to unadopted and unadoptable sewers.

Because the water authority criteria for adopting sewers, laid down in 1974, were allowed to differ from building regulation requirements; because developers were quick to maximise profit and slow to improve standards; and because local authorities were not empowered to enforce section 18 agreements on developers in planning permissions, hundreds of thousands of householders are left today with sewers serving their properties which are not, and which can never be, adopted, for example because pipes are too small or because they cross private land. Those householders face increasing costs to repair and maintain those sewers.

The Government were set for a blanket adoption of those sewers in the Bill, but they changed their mind. Now they appear to be saying that householders should have known about the problem and that, if they did not, their solicitor was negligent in not informing them. I gather that I should now advise my constituents—2,500 of them in one district authority alone in the area—that they should sue their solicitor. It promises to be interesting.

But the Government, set on their grand sell-off, have their mind on higher things. One is the NRA, which the Government claim is their passport to the greatness of the greens. The Government have established the NRA to monitor river and coastal pollution. It is ironic that they should have established it at a time when they will not have to provide the money to run it.

We are told that the NRA will monitor pollution and ensure that the polluter pays. I fail to see how that will be brought about. The legal maximum penalties for polluters, such as industry and farmers, are inadequate to the point of ridicule. Water authorities are virtually exempt from prosecution. Yet one in five of Britain's sewage works is breaking the law by discharging sub-standard waste into rivers. Untreated sewage leaks into rivers from 5,000 recorded sites. Storm overflows are exempt from all controls, yet in periods of heavy rainfall they deposit tons of untreated waste and sewage into seas and rivers.

The Bill allows water pics to maintain indefinitely their privilege of non-prosecution. Water authorities do not prosecute themselves. Once the Bill becomes law, the NRA will not be able to prosecute. The Government say that the water industry pollutes too often and on such a large scale that it would be unreasonable to expect it to stop. So much for the powers of the NRA. The NRA will be unable to do anything, other than complain, about this form of pollution.

It is reasonable for the public to expect that, when shareholders grab control of the water industry—when water charges increase to make up for the lack of past investment—those shareholders should have definite responsibilities for ending this scale of pollution.

I am cynical about this whole Bill. My cynicism derives from many many factors, but I will mention just one. For many years after the issue of the EC directive on bathing waters in 1976, the Department of the Environment defined a bathing beach in such a way that, in Wales for example, there was not a single bathing beach to which that directive could apply. My cynicism continues. Responsibility, as opposed to ideology, is not prominent in the Government's vocabulary, but it is understood that responsibility—or lack of it—is what this Bill is about. That is why three in four people oppose it. That is why we call on the Government, even now, to abandon these proposals and to allow common sense and the public interest to prevail.

8.11 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): At the last election I declared my opposition to proposals to nationalise—and I mean nationalise—the water and sewage disposal industry. We have heard a lot about privatisation, but it may be that some of my hon. Friends do not realise that this is the largest nationalisation measure that any Conservative Government will ever have passed.

When the question of privatising water was first mooted several years ago, I kept pointing out in the House that, unlike any of the other industries that were to be privatised —industries whose equity was vested in Ministers of the Crown—this one was not owned by the Government. This Bill, first of all, nationalises the entire water and sewage disposal industry, so all my colleagues who vote for the Third Reading tonight will be voting for the largest nationalisation measure ever offered to the House by any Conservative Government—and it is well that they should realise that. I certainly shall not be voting for it.

Privatisation only follows prior nationalisation under this measure. When I say that, it is not vested in any Minister. As has been pointed out already, in the representative case it was paid for in the first place by local authorities, or by combinations of local authorities, which raised the money by means of loans, and serviced those loans and repaid them by charges on the ratepayers—not just on the users of water and sewers. That was when the systems were owned by local authorities.

Of course, it is not true, as some facile hon. Members would have us believe, that water is in free supply—it most certainly is not. The cost of impounding it, the cost of pumping it, the cost of the distribution system, the cost of renewing old, inadequate and rotten distribution and sewerage systems, are immense, so a lot of investment is required to replace the rotten water supply systems and the inadequate and rotten sewerage systems. But we do not have to have this Bill in order to get the external financing limits that are necessary to do that. We do not have to have this Bill, lock, stock and barrel, in order to have a National Rivers Authority, with its functions; we could perfectly easily have had a Bill separating the functions of policing and inspection from the functions of supply and

distribution. That arrangement would most certainly have had me in the Division Lobby voting for it. It would have been an entirely sensible thing to do.

The greatest single benign characteristic of the Water Act 1973 was that it brought together the supply of water and the disposal of water after it had been used. The previous absurdity was that some authorities poured effluent, more or less—very often less, rather than more—purified, into rivers, and lower down the system other authorities extracted the water in order to supply it as allegedly fresh water. Of course it made sense to amalgamate those two functions. Unfortunately, what the 1973 Act did was make the poacher and the gamekeeper the same person—and that arrangement has never worked.

Anyone who lived through the torment of the pollution of the fresh water supply in north Cornwall, for instance, will know what I mean. I do not believe that the South West water authority prosecuted itself, although, quite rightly, it prosecutes others for polluting the public water supply. The NRA, if it is to be other than a laughing stock, will have to have ministerial sanction—not only sanction, but encouragement—to prosecute the water and sewerage authorities if they do not reach the necessary standards of purity. But how separate will the gamekeeper be from the poacher? In many areas the gamekeeper will not have his own laboratory for testing the water supply and the effluent, and will have to use the poacher's laboratory.

Mr. Boateng: We should have had the hon. Member on the Committee.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: If I had been on the Committee the Bill might not have come out of it quite so quickly.

Of course those functions are different. I would not wish to say that water companies will set out to supply polluted water. Of course they will not, because, unlike the present system—under which, if the authority is sued, it is the consumers who pay—if a private owner is sued, it is the shareholders who will suffer. That is certainly benign.

I could have been persuaded to support this measure if all the revenue, all the receipts from the sale of these assets, were to be recycled into defraying the cost of meeting the purification standards for water and sewerage effluent, of cleaning up our beaches and of replacing the hundreds of thousands of miles of rotten water-pipes and sewerage pipes that are either rotten or of inadequate diameter. If the money had been recycled for those purposes the Bill could have had my reluctant support; but the fact is that it is not so. It is the consumers who will be charged with the cost of bringing sewage effluent treatment and of piping and disposal up to the standards rightly required by the EEC.

We ought not to need the EEC to tell us what the standards should be. For years, mincing up turds and putting them into the sea as processed sewage really was a public scandal—"macerated" was the word that was used. I once swam out in a bay—I may say that it was in a holiday resort—to what I thought was a line of fishing floats, until I reached it and found that it was not.

This Bill is a wasted opportunity. The opportunity could have been taken to set up a really effective National Rivers Authority to define the effluent standards and to enforce statutorily the separation of sewage from storm water disposal. It is unforgivable that sewage works should overflow when there is a heavy downpour. The two systems should be different.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): Is it not correct that the control of pollution could be carried out more swiftly and perhaps more efficiently by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, which is not of great age?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: If the record of the alkali inspectorate had been such as to fill me with confidence, I might have found that an alluring suggestion. The case for setting up a new, independent inspectorate with its own testing facilities—not using those of some of the principal polluters—is very strong and unanswerable. That is what should have been in the Bill, instead of so much that is.

Again, how does one balance—the Bill does not do it for us—the needs of different sectors of the United Kingdom? In Devon, the population doubles in summer at the time when river flows are at their minimum. The cost of providing impounding facilities to avoid drought when there is a maximum inflow of people who are not normal ratepayers and minium river flows is immense. That cost falls upon the people who live there all the time and who derive less and less benefit from tourism as more and more people bring their holiday homes with them. Instead of staying in hotels or other permanent accommodation, more and more visitors arrive with caravans and tents, with the result that they spend very little, some of which would otherwise go towards the extra infrastructure costs.

Nobody but a fool provides a reservoir at a low level, with the result that all the water has to be pumped at hideous expense, if it can be placed much higher up where the water would flow by gravity. However, those who live in parts of the country to which other people like to go are told that reservoirs must not be put on the moors because that would spoil the view that visitors want to enjoy when they go on holiday. The people who say that do not, however, have to bear the additional expense of low-lying reservoirs from which all the water has to be pumped. There is no rectification of that issue in a Bill that is so large that it had to be printed in two physical parts because the staples would not go though it in one.

At 10 o'clock, which is not so very far ahead, I shall be in the No Lobby. Those are some of the reasons why.

8.23 pm

Mr. Wigley: I agree with many of the points that have been made by the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop). The sea coast problems to which he referred are also faced by Wales. Wales also has to support a large population in summer and needs to have the capacity to supply it. Many of the additional costs that Wales has to face have to be borne in the south-west, too—in Devon in particular.

The hybridity of the Bill was referred to earlier. The hon. Member for Tiveton did a lot of work some years ago on the question of hybridity. Between now and further consideration of the Bill elsewhere I hope that he will have the opportunity to consider whether this is a hybrid Bill. If he did so, he would be doing the House a service. He might be able to find a means by which to deflect the Bill from its movement towards the statute book.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: My dislike of monopolies is so great that I would not wish to have a monopoly in the detection and processing of hybridity.

Mr. Wigley: I think that many hon. Members could sit at the knee of the hon. Member for Tiverton and learn about the intrigues and the ins and outs of hybridity, which we should not go into in too great a detail now unless we can prove it. I wish that we could.

Wales did not vote for the Bill at the last election. Wales did not want it. It wants it even less now, the Bill having been subjected to weeks of debate in Committee. For once, Welsh Opposition Members were almost totally united, both in detail as well as in their general approach, in their opposition to the Bill. Week after week we put to the Government a central fallacy—the cost of water to the consumer. That point was not answered in Committee and it was not answered on Report.

The Government tried to get away with press propaganda in Wales. They suggested early in March that there would be a massive reduction in the price of water. In a debate in this Chamber on 1 March, the Under-Secretary of State for Wales told the House:

"Opposition Members may have a surprise coming to them because it is our intention to give the people of Wales every opportunity to take a stake in their own water company in a way that has not been possible before."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1989; Vol. 148, c. 368.]

That does not feature in the Bill, and there has been no suggestion as to how it may come about. The people of Wales will not have a 25 per cent. reduction in the price of water, although Ministers tried to sell it in the Welsh press. The reduction was then disowned during earlier debates on Report. In fact, there will be a massive increase in the price of water. It will be on top of other increases in recent years.

During the last few days I have received a letter from someone who lives in the Aberdare area of Mid Glamorgan. This person pointed out that water rates have increased from £23 in 1981-82 to £107 in 1989-90—a fourfold increase. I prophesy, on the basis of what we were told in Committee, that the price of water will increase to about £250 by 1995. That is because there is a need, as everybody recognises, for considerable investment in the industry to improve standards. The Government argue that the only way to secure the resources that are necessary for the work that must be undertaken is to privatise the industry. The Opposition have argued time after time that the only way that capital funds can be attracted is by a massive increase in the price of water, an increase that would hit hard the poorest people in the community.

There is a danger with privatisation that, as private companies find that they do not have the resources to attract capital, the degree of capital investment will be inadequate. That will have an effect on pollution, of which we in Wales are conscious—pollution in the industrial areas and along our coastline. There is a real danger that there will be a reduction in the capital investment that is so much needed in order to meet EEC standards and those that we ought to have set many years ago.

In Committee we asked the Government to clarify the guarantees for shareholders, but the guillotine prevented discussion of amendments that would have led to a large slice of the shareholding going to consumers within the areas served by the private water companies and also to a slice of the shares going to the employees of the private water companies. The Government have made no such provision. Conservative Members who argue that the water industry will be answerable at regional level cannot guarantee that that will happen. Shareholdings will be subject to market fluctuations. Shares will be bought and sold in order to make a profit or a long-term return. They will not be bought and sold to guarantee that the private water companies are answerable to the regions that they serve.

The only way in which the finances of privatisation can add up is by the provision of a massive capital write-off of historic debt. If that debt is written off, why on earth was it not written off before, to bring down the water charges that people face? Perhaps for the only time during the passage of the Bill I want to disagree with the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey), who referred to the low disparity between charges in various parts of this country as compared with France. In fact, the average equated water rate in 1988-89 in Thames was 33p in the pound, in Severn-Trent 51p in the pound, in north-west England 59p in the pound—and in Wales, it was 108p in the pound. That is almost four times the rate in the Thames area. These charges are high and we are facing yet higher charges. If there is to be a capital write-off, why cannot there be one in the public sector?

The capital value of the Welsh water authority is £1,700 million, and if, as seems likely, it is to be sold off for £250 million or £300 million, why do not the Government go the whole way and enable water consumers in Wales to have the shareholding at a nominal cost, and then at least guarantee that there is answerability in Wales? The same formula could apply to the regions of England.

The other part of the Bill deals with the National Rivers Authority. All the Opposition parties argued in Committee that the Bill represents an unwanted and unwelcome centralisation of the Welsh water industry, with the establishment of the centralised form of the NRA. That is not to say that there was not a case for taking away powers from the plcs and giving them to the NRA, but they should not be given to a centralised body in London. That is to take away the powers that the Welsh water authority has over rivers. The version of the NRA in the Bill provides inadequate involvement for important groups who are concerned with rivers, such as anglers and other interest groups. There is also inadequate capital for the NRA, a subject that has already been touched on this evening.

No doubt other hon. Members have received the letter that I have from Professor Edwards, the chairman of the regional rivers division of the Welsh water authority. On 22 March he wrote pressing that the NRA should be allowed

"to have the benefit of long-term borrowing where this is necessary in order to carry out any of its statutory functions . . . the authority must have flexibility to use loan finance for all capital expenditure."

Some progress was made on the issue of flooding earlier tonight, but the general argument has not been dealt with —and this letter was sent by someone who is involved in its detail.

Many outside groups are unhappy with the Bill. The National Farmers Union of Wales has written:

"Farmers are deeply concerned at the lack of control over the ability of the proposed private water companies operating as monopolies to raise their charges, particularly in rural area where their costs are higher."

That was one of a number of concerns expressed to us by people who usually support the Conservatives and who are unhappy about these proposals.

Farmers and conservationists are fearful about clauses 7 and 9. Recreational bodies have fears about access to land—97,000 acres of it in Wales, forming a considerable part of the most beautiful areas there.

There are still no adequate safeguards, despite recent Government statements, against the dangers of selling off. There are fears among environmentalists about the Bill's effect on pollution, and among the poverty lobby about its effects on disconnection and compulsory metering. There are fears in Wales that we shall once again be at the end of the queue and that the Bill will do nothing to help solve our problems or to redress the problems that Welsh water consumers have faced over the years.

Although we have put an awful lot of time into it, the Bill leaves the House as unacceptable as it was back before Christmas. That is why my hon. Friends and I will most certainly vote against Third Reading.

8.33 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I have listened with great interest to a number of speeches in this debate. The speech by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) led me to assume that the once great internationalists and Europeans among the Democrats have now become the arch-chauvinists. The hon. Gentleman attacked the French with a venom that seemed like the reincarnation of the first Lord Beaverbrook.

I listened with great interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell). He complained about the quality of our water, the speed with which the Government reacted to the bathing-water directive, the quality of our rivers and the inadequate level of investment in the water industry. He seemed not to realise that every argument he put forward underlined, rather than undermined, the case for water privatisation. He is typical of many who oppose the Bill, those who continue to attack the consequences of the very status quo that they seek to defend. The hon. Gentleman seemed to forget that the problems of the water industry are the direct consequence of public ownership. His argument about the quality of our rivers was an argument for the National Rivers Authority.

The problems of the water industry are aggravated by inadequate capital investment. That is an argument that Opposition Members should well understand; it was the Labour Government who cut investment in the water industry. As long as the water industry remains in public ownership, it will receive inadequate capital investment. So long as it has to compete with schools, hospitals, roads and railways, it will be starved of the investment that it needs. Once the industry is in the private sector, it will be able to tap the market in the same way as Cable and Wireless has done so successfully—it has increased its capital expenditure dramatically.

I hope that, when my hon. and learned Friend finalises the details of the privatisation issue, he will give the privatised plcs a decent dowry, and that a substantial proportion of the money raised by privatisation will be used to improve the balance sheets of the plcs so that they can invest substantially in the capital expenditure that is so necessary.

We have heard from hon. Members such as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) about the problems of monopoly. He forgets that the water companies will be controlled much more effectively in the private sector than in the public sector. The experience of British Telcom and British Gas shows that. No Secretary of State for Energy ever managed to control Sir Denis Rooke——

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Why, since British Telecom has been in the private sector, has the number of complaints from domestic and commercial users increased dramatically?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Not on Third Reading of the Water Bill.

Mr. Marshall: I shall ignore that irrelevant and inaccurate interruption. My point about British Gas is that, when Sir Denis Rooke presided over a company in the public sector, Secretary of State after Secretary of State tried and failed to control him. Ofgas was the first body to control Sir Denis Rooke, and Oftel has worked, too——

Mr. Beith: But British Gas had to be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Marshall: The important thing is that privatisation worked, and it will work with the water industry too——

Mr. Boateng: It says here.

Mr. Marshall: I write my own speeches. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman does, but I know from having listened to him in Harare yesterday that he spoke for more than an hour when he was billed to speak for less than half an hour.

I welcome the possibility of water metering. The present system of charging for water is unfair. Why should the pensioner, consuming one third of the water consumed by her next-door neighbour, pay the same for that water? No one suggests that there should be a standard charge for electricity——

Mr. Boateng: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marshall: As long as the hon. Gentleman is briefer than he was yesterday.

Mr. Boateng: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern about the impact on the pensioner of the standing charge and will he urge the Secretary of State to amend this Bill in another place so that the pensioner is protected from the standing charge?

Mr. Marshall: I happen to believe that the pensioner, who will already benefit substantially under the community charge, should be a substantial beneficiary of water metering. A pensioner household consumes very much less water than households with three or four children and sometimes with three or four wage-earners. Why should pensioners, as they do under the present system, pay substantially the same amount for water when they are consuming much less of it?

I also believe that water metering would lead to much more economical use of water. When the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) was "Minister for Drought" in those long-lost days of the Labour Government, he was able to persuade people suddenly to reduce their consumption of water dramatically. I believe that, if we had water meters, there would be no need for a minister for drought to persuade people to use less water; the price mechanism would do it for him. Why should people pay for large amounts of water when

[Mr. Marshall]

they are small consumers? It is surely much fairer that the pensioner and the single person should pay less than large households.

The Water Bill is a Bill for greater efficiency. No one can regard the water industry under public ownership as a paragon of efficiency. Under private ownership, the water industry's prices will be controlled. The only way in which water companies will be able to increase profits is by becoming more efficient. Surely that is an objective we should all applaud and approve.

I should like to ask the opponents of privatisation why it is that the Socialist President and Prime Minister of France have shown no enthusiasm for nationalising their water industry. The answer is simple: they understand that a water industry under private ownership is more likely to be efficient in providing the water the people need.

Recently I read a speech by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) addressing the Scottish council of the SDP—I believe it is known as a cottage meeting. He said that the Water Bill was encouraging French companies to buy British water companies. He seemed to ignore the fact that there is a golden share to prevent the plcs from being acquired as soon as privatisation takes place. I was somewhat surprised to see the great former Foreign Secretary, the man who was the great European—[AN HON. MEMBER:"Who said he was great?"] He did; he was always telling us he was great. I was surpised to see him becoming the great chauvinist and the great opponent of the France.

I believe that this Bill will provide the capital to modernise the water industry, clean up our rivers and improve our beaches. It is in the interests of the consumer, the efficiency of the industry and the environment and it should be warmly welcomed.

8.44 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I hope that the speech of the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) will be widely distributed, not only in Hendon but throughout the country, because it well illustrates many of the errors into which he and his hon. Friends have fallen, not least the Secretary of State, who I am very glad to see here. If I had the time, I would enlarge upon the point about the single user of water. We all use water for all sorts of purposes, and the single elderly pensioner requires cleanliness from everybody she meets and everyone who deals with food and the cleanliness of the community. Without pure, clean, cheap water public health would be at risk.

When the House was built it relied on privatised water. I think that the Chelsea water company supplied it. Unfortunately, at that stage, when that water was used it disappeared with all its contents into the river and it was not until the 1860s that the Metropolitan Board of Works built the Victoria embankment, largely for intercepting sewers, and we had drainage in London.

The Bill has three major aspects which so far have not featured largely in debates either in Committee or on Report. The first is that for the first time in history our foul water drainage and purification will be privatised. I believe that this is the first time that this has been tried anywhere in the world, but the Minister will correct me if I am wrong. Secondly, the private firms controlling foul water disposal will for the first time—after the golden share disappears—be controlled from outside the United Kingdom. Thirdly, these private firms will not be confined, as private water companies are at the moment, to the supply and disposal of water. They will be permitted to diversify. That is a point which the Secretary of State confirmed at the start of the debate when he kindly gave way to me.

I have in my hand a press release from Mr. Roy Watts, of the Thames water authority, dated 24 November. He talks about the future and says:

> "We shall also be able to move into new, non-regulated areas of activity at home and abroad, water related or not, for the benefit of future shareholders, and customers."

[Interruption.] I hear the Secretary of State—I think it was he—saying "Hear hear."

Those three features are, I believe, even more fundamental than the idea of private water supply, which has been largely the theme of Conservative Members. I believe that it is wholly contrary even to that Victorian virtue of collective activity in pursuit of public health, because no Victorian believed in private disposal and purification of water. That is what the Government are doing—largely, I believe, because of their ignorance of what all this means. They are also hiding from the public their real motives and the likely effects of the legislation.

Of course, the National Rivers Authority will be an improvement over what we have at the moment, but it could have been achieved without privatisation. I hope that the NRA will carry out the same model activity as the late lamented Thames Conservancy. We on the River Thames remember that body, which was set up in the middle of the Victorian era, and hope that the NRA will, through proper local consultation and balanced use of many types of water space, bring back the sort of administration that we enjoyed on the Thames many years ago, and which I hope will be recreated. But that has not been the theme of Conservative Members. We have had carbon copy speeches, of which the contribution of the hon. Member for Hendon, South was typical. They have said that there was no, or very little, public investment prior to 1979 and it had been inadequate and impossible post-1979, conveniently forgetting the past 10 years.

Both arguments are specious. The Government do not want to invest in public water supply and disposal. They do not believe in it because they do not believe in public service as a concept. There may be a few Conservative Members who believe in public service as a concept, but I do not believe that the Secretary of State does. Where public service has remained, instead of being given, even on a limited scale, quality, sustenance and high standards, it has been undermined in Bill after Bill, and regulation after regulation.

As an example of this—I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) is not here—the Government have removed local authority members from water authorities. How much more undemocratic can they get? I believe that that was done because originally they wanted to privatise water anyway and that was a step many years ago in that direction. It carries dogma beyond the limits of logic, common sense and political sagacity. Political sagacity is in short supply among Conservative Members and particularly at No. 10 Downing street.

I wonder what Alderman Roberts of Grantham would have said if it had been suggested that the purity and public health of Grantham would in future depend on a private

company whose area covered the whole of the east midlands and East Anglia, which had shares traded in Tokyo, New York and Frankfurt, which could perhaps be controlled from anywhere in the world, and which could be subject to a takeover bid by any multinational. I wonder what today's inhabitants of Grantham would think about that. I do not think that they know the full implications of the Bill, and that is one of the problems.

When the Secretary of State opened the debate he fairly and quite properly lauded private water suppliers. We in London know that our first private water supplies came from the great New River company. It collected water from springs in Amwell in Hertfordshire and brought it to London and sold it. It was very good water. It came from the chalk of Hertfordshire and was God-given. There was nothing wrong at that time—and, indeed, there is not now, in Tory terms—in the collection, impounding, piping purification, distribution and sale of pure water by private companies. That is carried on at the moment under due regulation, but the Bill does not continue that pattern. It destroys a pattern of statutory water companies which I do not support, but at least they worked in harmony with the municipal services for over a century. That will now go.

Not only has the London county council disappeared but the Greater London Council has disappeared with it. In my constituency that is of considerable significance in terms of health. Every drop of water which falls on the roofs, roads and pavements or comes from the baths, closets, factories, works or workplaces in north London is piped into my constituency to the Beckton purification works. From there it is pumped over 30 ft from the low-level to the high-level sewers before it is purified and goes into the Thames.

When I first became interested in politics my party chairman was a member of the London county council and was chairman of its rivers and drainage committee. At that time he was heavily involved in a huge capital programme of £20 million. That does not sound much now, but I assure Conservative Members that in the 1950s it was a great deal of money and it was spent on improving the northern and southern outfall works of the London county council. Nobody heard much about that. We did that in London for the disposal of water just as it was done in Birmingham for the supply of water, and we are to lose control even of our pumps and the equipment that deals with these matters in London.

The same loss will be suffered in the constituencies of every Conservative Member and that means that we shall be in the hands of managers such as Mr. Roy Watts. They will be cruising the world looking for worthwhile investments, perhaps in water or perhaps in other things. They will be sharks in an international sea. The plcs will be predatory in order to sustain their activities. In the end the Director General of Water Services will have to agree the necessary funds to keep water supplies going in London and every other part of the country. What collateral for any international speculator!

If the Bill goes through the other place substantially as it is now, we will have a sort of internationalisation or multinationalisation of our public health services. The House and the public may not yet have appreciated that. Ministers are in the Chamber. If I have said anything that is incorrect I shall gladly give way and allow them to correct me. The Bill reaches the low water mark of the limited and unacceptable philosophies of the Government. It pushes private ownership into areas where it is not only unwelcome but unworkable and in the end the public will not stand for that. It besmirches the sense of responsible citizenship which lurks within most Conservative voters. That is the reason for their present unease. If the Bill becomes an Act it will pollute the standards of public life throughout the nation in the way that polluted water poisons the body. In due course, but not first without weakening the body politic, the Bill and its works will be rejected because a reluctant and disbelieving public will not stomach it or the Government from whom it sprang.

8.54 pm

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): Most of the speeches so far have been aimed at the contents of the Bill. On the whole, I should like to look at it rather more politically. On reflection I have decided to vote in favour of Third Reading, but without enthusiasm, because I do not think that there is much, if anything, to be gained from an upheaval which will do no more, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) said, than turn public monopolies into private monopolies.

I know that the water plcs will enjoy the freedom to borrow in the market the capital that they need to invest and certainly a great deal of investment is needed. But existing water authorities could enjoy that freedom as the result of an administrative decision freeing them from the constraints of the public service borrowing requirement and the overall effect on the economy would be precisely the same.

I shall accede to the Chief Whip's request to support the Bill even though that means that I shall be acting contrary to the desires of Conservatives in my constituency. I emphasise the word "Conservatives". I could say all Conservatives or more certainly all Conservatives who have spoken to me about the Bill. I suspect that lurking somewhere in my constituency there is one or perhaps about 100 Conservatives who support the Bill. However, I must admit that I have not yet met them. That is of some concern to me but it may be a worry about 100 times greater for the Government because I doubt whether my constituents are unique.

My worries fall roughly into two sections. First, there are those who are worried about the National Rivers Authority. The objectives of those people and the objectives of the Government are not very different, but those people do not share the Government's optimism about the Bill's ability to achieve the Government's objectives. Obviously the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) said, there is much concern among anglers and others. Their concerns have not been adequately expressed because time for debate has been limited or non-existent. Therefore, I hope that the Government will listen with sympathy and with concessions in mind to the debate in another place in the knowledge that those who are worried about the NRA simply want to be more certain that it will live up to expectation.

The second section of people who are much more opposed to the Bill are the massive numbers who are concerned that they will have to face a major rise in prices. It is difficult to believe that they are totally wrong. The rise in prices may be the fault of the Labour Government, who cut investment in water, but the electorate now care little or nothing about that Labour Government. For some of

[Sir Charles Morrison]

us 10 years ago may seem like yesterday, but for the man in the street 10 years ago has disappeared into the mists of time, like the South Sea Bubble, the loss of the American colonies and other disasters. Therefore, I urge the Government to remember that, while the Whips may hold sway in the House, they have no influence in the country.

8.59 pm

Mr. Pike: The hon. Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) would be better advised at least to abstain tonight, if he does not follow his conscience and vote against Third Reading. I do not believe that there is any reason why he should feel confident that the other House will take the necessary action to put right a Bill about which he has expressed strong reservations.

The Secretary of State opened the debate. He gave his reasons for believing that Government action was necessary to deal with the problems in the water industry. If he really believes that the position is as he stated, he should recognise that the present set-up for the industry results from the Water Act 1973, which was implemented by a Conservative Government. Changes were made by the Water Act 1983 which removed local authority representation from water authorities.

If I had been able to make an intervention in the Secretary of State's speech, I would have asked him if, in all honesty, he believed that the Minister who steered the 1973 Act through the House should still hold office in the Government as a member of the Cabinet if the legislation was as disastrous for the industry as the Secretary of State believes. If it has failed, surely the Minister who made that terrible blunder, in the Secretary of State's view, is not fit to hold office.

The hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) thought that in the main we can be proud of the water industry, although there are problems. The Select Committee on the Environment drew attention to some of the problems when it inquired into rivers and estuaries in 1987. One result of that is the establishment of the National Rivers Authority. It has to be accepted that it was not the structure of the industry put through in the 1973 Act, which set up the river basin concept and the 10 authorities, that led to any failure. If there have been failings, they have resulted from lack of investment in the industry, which is directly the responsibility of Government.

On numerous occasions Ministers have quoted what happened during the Labour Government's period of office between 1974 and 1979 but they did not mention that the Conservative Government, who have been in office for almost 10 years—next month will see the tenth anniversary of them taking power—have had sufficient time to ensure that water quality is right, that the standard of rivers is improving and that sewage treatment is being carried out more effectively. All the necessary work might not have been completed, but if the Conservative Government had made proper investment over the past 10 years there would not be as many problems.

Only a few weeks ago in his Budget speech the Chancellor announced a surplus of £14 billion to £15 billion but still the Government have failed to invest the money necessary to deal with the problems. Investment is the key. If the Government had a mind to do so, they could retain the industry in the public sector. It does not have to be privatised.

The Secretary of State failed to recognise that the Labour party has not argued for the status quo or that no changes are necessary. We accept that some things need to be changed. We accept that the separation of the water functions from the regulatory body is a step in the right direction. However, at every stage of this Bill we have expressed our fears that in the end the NRA will not necessarily receive sufficient powers, staffing or resources to carry out its function. The Minister referred to the powers of the director general. We fear that the director general will not have the powers to deal with the regulatory functions provided for that position in the Bill.

Not only is there strong opposition to the Bill in this House, but water privatisation did not receive the support of the majority of voters at the last general election. Only one party during the last general election campaign was committed to privatising the water industry and that party did not receive the majority of votes from the people voting in that election. I accept that it received more votes than the Labour party, but if we include the votes for the other Opposition parties, there were far more votes against the water industry being privatised than there were in favour of it.

Opinion polls show that the public are still opposed to the privatisation of the water industry. This Bill will not deal with all the problems. At the end of the day, the legislation will fail because profit will become more important than dealing with the problems in the industry.

If the private sector had been able to yield a profit from water supply, instead of having 20 per cent. of the water supply in the private sector now, there would have been 100 per cent., because people would have invested in it and developed the system. The simple fact is that sewerage has always been a public service function because there is no profit in sewerage and there never will be.

If the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) believes that metering is a fair solution, he fails to recognise the penalties that will be imposed on people with large families, families with disabled people in them, and other families who face extra demands for water because of problems within the family.

I recognise that other hon. Members wish to speak so I will be brief. I believe very strongly that this Bill fails to tackle the problems. If the Government were willing to deal with the problems in the industry, there could be an effective regulatory body and an NRA. With proper investment for the industry and a willingness on the part of the Government, the problems could be dealt with. The public would have confidence that the public sector could solve the problems. The Government should change their minds and drop the Bill now.

9.7 pm

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): I support the Third Reading. Over the years I have had the pleasure to be a member of many Standing Committees, but being a member of the Water Bill Committee gave me the most unalloyed pleasure. My hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning and his team of Ministers comprehensively outplayed the Opposition in every

department of the game. They won all the arguments, not only because of the skill of their advocacy, but because of the inherent superiority of their case.

I was very interested to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who came down as unambiguously as I have ever heard any Opposition Front Bench spokesman come down in favour of renationalisation of the water industry. The Labour party has lost much of its empire, but it is re-finding a role, nationalisation. Clause 4 is what the Labour party is all about—the means of production, distribution and exchange.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) says that this is the biggest act of nationalisation ever done by the Conservative Government; if that be the case, perhaps the Opposition will follow us into the Lobby tonight.

This measure differs from any other denationalisation measure in so far as a quarter of the industry is already in private hands. I would like to talk briefly about the statutory water companies, which have supported the Government's proposals to transfer the water supply and sewerage operations of the water authorities into the private sector and have been involved in discussions with the Department for many months about the details. They have certan legitimate concerns about how their interests and those of their consumers and employees will be affected.

The areas of concern are, first, debt write-offs. The statutory water companies cannot be relieved of their present debt liability in the way water authorities can. Many of the water companies had very high gearing ratios and the adjustment of water authority debt to provide favourable gearing will inevitably cause statutory water companies to be less favourably regarded by financial institutions.

Secondly, there are the flotation terms. These might make investment in water service plcs a more attractive proposition than a statutory water company and could reduce the relative creditworthiness of the statutory water companies.

Thirdly, there are the differing financial regimes. The authorities and the companies have operated under different regimes approved by Parliament. In the case of the authorities, this has tended to produce low levels of borrowing and high charges, whereas with the statutory companies there have been high levels of borrowing and low charges. The rate of return is therefore very different, as is the level of charges under which the undertakings will enter price increase limitation regimes. Unless these differences are recognised, the ability of the statutory water companies to fund their businesses will be prejudiced, as they will be seen as less creditworthy than the privatised water authorities.

Their capital structure is unique. In addition to conventional debenture and loan stock borrowing, they are based on ordinary share capital, whose dividends historically have been subject to statutory limitation. The yields on these different categories of shares have offered virtually complete security as a result of the ability of the companies to levy rates on consumers reflecting the costs incurred. These shares were attractive to investors seeking fixed income securities offering franked income. The situation will now be totally changed, and it follows that the K-setting regime should recognise the need for the statutory water companies to establish a substantial equity base.

Fourthly, on takeovers, my right hon. Friend has announced that the privatised water authorities will be given a golden share to protect them during their fledgling years after the flotation. Although the statutory water companies are already in the private sector, the fledgling argument could also apply to them. They will have to adjust to a different financial and commercial regime; they will have to adjust to the requirements of the Director General of Water Services and the NRA and will have to carry out substantial capital works in order to comply with the requirements of the EC directive on water quality. The reasons for giving the privatised water authorities protection against takeover could equally be argued to apply to the statutory companies.

My right hon. Friend has also announced special MMC procedures in respect of mergers of water undertakings which have a gross asset value of more than £30 million to ensure the effective operation of comparative competition. However, I do not believe that the size of the operation is any guarantee of efficiency. Small undertakings can be just as efficient as large ones, and in some cases more so, and I do not think it is logical that the director general should be deprived of efficient comparators simply because they are small. This is certainly an argument for applying the MMC procedures to all undertakings.

I am aware that my right hon. Friend will have a discretion to refer small mergers, and I hope that he will occasionally be disposed to exercise it. As my hon. and learned Friend said in the debate on Report stage:

"to preserve all 39 water undertakers in independent ownership . . . would be to tend to freeze the existing pattern of ownership in the industry, and there is no reason to suppose that . . . is necessarily the best or most efficient."—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 1176.]

It is likely that in certain areas that course may be the most appropriate in circumstances of comparative competition. I hope that my right hon. Friend will bear in mind the fact that where there is no mandatory requirement to refer there may be a public interest in so doing.

These are matters to which there is no easy answer. I know that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister has listened carefully to the Water Authorities Association and the companies and that his officials have been extremely patient and helpful. I hope that during the remaining course of the Bill answers will be found to those problems and I wish the Bill a successful passage.

9.14 pm

Mr. Boateng: We have concentrated on Third Reading on two aspects of privatisation—the privatisation of environmental protection and amenities on the one hand and the privatisation of the collection of water and its distribution on the other. At the outset the Secretary of State reassured us that he did not intend to privatise the raindrops, only the places where those raindrops are collected or where water welled. We are supposed to give thanks for that much comfort.

I want to concentrate on one other aspect of privatisation—the privatisation of the public health facility that the public supply and distribution of water has traditionally sought to protect.

When we look at the formation of the water industry as we know it today, we see that our Victorian forefathers

[Mr. Boateng]

sought above all else to protect the nation's health. It is that self-same public health which the Opposition submit is at risk as a result of this act of privatisation.

The Secretary of State told us, in an insight that he had into Labour history—I would say a blighted insight—that the Bill was the single most important measure of environmental protection since the Labour party was a gleam in Keir Hardie's eye. That was the Secretary of State's analysis, which I want to take him up on. I want to look at a period in which the Labour party was a gleam in the young Keir Hardie's eye.

We heard from the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) of the situation in the French Cameroons. I know nothing of the French Cameroons, but I do know something of the Kingdom of Ashanti, where I was baptised, and I do know something of London, the city in which I was born.

I want to take the Secretary of State back to the 19th century, as he would have us do, and refer him to a letter in *The Times* of 11 February 1875 from a Mr. Humphry Sandwith of Wimbledon. What was it that created such a feeling of anxiety in Mr. Sandwith at that time? He begins his letter to the editor by reminding him of the great steps forward that were taken in water sanitation. He says:

"On the outbreak of the Ashantee War you did good service in the cause of sanitary reform on behalf of our negro fellow-subjects and a few unfortunate Englishmen who were condemned to linger in bad health or to die on that pestilential coast. You pointed out clearly that a bad climate was robbed of half its terrors if the inhabitants could command pure air and pure water".

I am bound to say that I take issue with Mr. Sandwith on his description of the Gold Coast as being a pestilential coast. I also take issue with him on the benefits to the people of the Gold Coast of the Ashanti war. My great grandfather fought on the losing side in that conflict. However, I am bound to say that as a result of his efforts and those of many of my ancestors, we were able to ensure that Ashanti became only a protectorate, not a colony. I know that many Conservative Members from the district commissioner brigade know full well the distinction between a colony and a protectorate. The battle was not completely without its victory.

The editor of *The Times* is taken to task on the impact of the state on that day in 1875 of drinking water and its supply to certain sections of our city. Mr. Sandwith says:

"I now venture to ask for your powerful aid, not on behalf of Africans, but of the unfortunate dwellers in the West-end of London, the peers, spiritual and temporal, the baronets, knights and esquires who inhabit the fashionable quarters of this singularly filthy and wealthy city."

His reference to a

"singularly filthy and wealthy city"

is redolent of certain aspects of the city in which we live today. He goes on:

"The immediate cause of my appeal is the following fact. At a large West-end club the drinking water supplied by a certain water company left such abundant deposits of mud in the cisterns that it was necessary frequently to clean them. I saw large cakes of this dried mud, which had a peculiarly offensive appearance; a portion of it was sent to an eminent analyst."

Under the Bill, which the Government seek to push through on Third Reading, the public will be obliged to rely on water companies themselves for analysis, but in those days at least that work was done by an independent analyst. The writer continues:

"He found it to consist of various unwholesome debris and of a considerable quantity of human excrement. Now, Sir, I ask, are the people of this city, are the wealthy and refined, as well as the poor and the helpless, content to go on drinking this repulsive mixture? A grand scheme is afloat to tunnel the Channel, millions are found to lend to Czars and Sultans; cannot London find money to bring us pure water from Wales?"

That was in the 19th century, when that correspondent to *The Times* felt it necessary to draw to the attention of the editor and the general public the consequences of privately owned and distributed water. His response was to suggest—as came to be the case—that the municipalities and the public interest be protected by bringing the supply and distribution of water under public control. That made sense then to our forefathers in Ashanti and in London.

The Secretary of State for the Environment—and we have done our research—does not appear to be a member of any London club, although no doubt he would count himself among the wealthy, if not the refined. It must be said that his hon. and learned Friend does belong to the Carlton. However, one would have thought that even out of concern for the wealthy and refined, for the members of London clubs—never mind the poor and oppressed for whom the Conservatives have never shown concern—and for public health, even at this late stage the Government would abandon this disastrous measure. In so doing, they would save themselves from the fate that Lord Rosebery pointed out lay in wait for any Government. He said:

"Water is one of those points which has wrecked a powerful government before now, and may wreck governments again."

We believe that the Bill will wreck the present Government, and that they will rue the day that they brought it to this House.

9.22 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): When the history of this Bill is written, the contributions of the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boetang) throughout the Committee stage will be remembered as a delightfully irrelevant footnote. He has kept up that tradition right to the end, and I am sure that the whole House thanks him for his further eloquent but totally irrelevant contribution to the passage of our great Bill.

As we near the conclusion of this stage of the Bill, it is right that we should be as honest as possible—as we always are. My right hon. and hon. Friends recognise that it is a tricky Bill and one of whose merits it is difficult to convince the public. However, the public will ultimately be convinced of its value because it epitomises many of the things that the Government have striven to achieve over the years. The Government have taken upon their shoulders the mantle of the radical, belying the term Conservative that is part of the title of the party. We have been radical in respect of this issue.

The Government have also tackled, and not for the first time, sceptical public opinion. In this country, public opinion is innately conservative. Much needs to be changed that can only be challenged by the radical. We have also challenged the cosy presumption that public and state is best—and in some cases is all. That belief flies in the face of what people have often said, and flies in the face of that which people have often voted against. Nevertheless, it is something we have had to tackle.

In dealing with the objections of my own constituents, I have found that the more the Bill is explained to them,

and the more that matters are made clear, the more support the Bill generates. Many people are unaware that 25 per cent. of the country is already served by private water suppliers. Many people to whom I have spoken have been unaware that there is public regulation contained in the Bill to ensure quality—the National Rivers Authority, the Director General of Water Services. Many have been unaware of the failure of past investment which we have covered innumerable times, both in Committee and on the Floor of the House. It is important that some of the failures of previous Governments have not been well touched on by hon. Opposition Members tonight.

In dealing with people's concerns, we have been able to point to some encouraging things. We have recalled their concern about other measures carried out by the Government, principally gas and British Telecom. When the measures have been put through, opposition has fallen away and there has been encouragement of wider share ownership and wider participation by employees in their own industries. All these are things that the Government have tackled in many other areas in exactly the same way as they seek to tackle them in the water industry. There are areas where public concern has been very strong at the time that the measure has gone through Parliament but has faded away afterwards as the benefits have become clear.

When it comes to future benefits, I ask the Minister to comment on a couple of things when he replies to the debate. The first is the benefits that may come from the sale of expertise abroad. When private companies develop expertise in dealing with water in this country that technology will be available for use abroad. Why do we always assume that the French will come here and run our industry? Why do we not assume that people in this country will be able to export their expertise?

Perhaps the Minister should also mention the consumers' charter. Again, this is something which is often unknown to our constituents until we talk to them about it as a future benefit which they do not at present receive but which they will get from the way in which water will be supplied to them in future.

If there is one matter, in particular, which is inadequately dealt with at present and which the Minister may be able to clear up for the future, it is disconnections. The Minister is aware of the reservations felt that I and many on both sides of the House feel about the fact that at present a court order is not necessary before the water supply is disconnected. That should become the norm. I ask the Minister very strongly to consider this and see what the Director General of Water Services may make of such a code of practice if he could put it his way for consideration. That would be a very useful thing to do.

My constituents are particularly reassured when they think about the policies of hon. Members of the Opposition. When they think about some of the measures that we have introduced, they remember that the Opposition have caved in to our views on the sale of council housing, on the rights of the individual in trade unions, on renationalisation of many industries. They are encouraged that once again our views will hold sway and that once again the Opposition will cave in.

We believe that the measure will work. It must work. With these things in mind, opinion in the country will be convinced and the measure will be seen in future as a great success.

9.27 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): In my brief remarks I will not go over many of the views, well expressed in the course of the debate, about the mistaken assumption that taking a natural monopoly and putting it into the private sector will somehow improve quality standards and also protect consumers. I will just touch on the argument that those people who live alone will benefit from metering. It ignores the fact that, on the water boards' own figures in the trial areas where metering is taking place and where the standing charges have been applied, even a pensioner will pay significantly more under metering than at present. Those people who have more than one person in the house, who have young children or who care for an elderly relative, will pay a great deal more because of the greater amount of water that they will need. It is not very helpful for some hon. Members to suggest that water will be rationed because of its high costs and that that is a good thing in itself.

Something which has not so far been dealt with but which came up in Committee is the concern of people who have bought houses on estates where the sewers, laid by private contractors, are sub-standard, and will not be adopted by the local water authorities or private plcs, if and when they come in, will not adopt the sewerage systems. Incidentally, according to the argument of some Government Members, everything in the private sector is rosy, everything will be more efficient and better delivered. If that were the case, constituents of mine in Winchester avenue, Bottesford would not be suffering from sub-standard sewerage systems. Nor would those of the many hon. Members from all parts of the country who have raised similar problems.

Under the Bill the same people who laid those sub-standard sewerage systems will presumably be able to tender successfully to lay more such systems. The Bill does not protect quality standards. It represents yet another missed opportunity. It could have improved water quality, and protected conservation access and sites of special scientific interest. The Secretary of State has conceded a very small point on national parks: there will, he says, be consultation on the part of the privatised water companies. Nevertheless, they can still ignore the wishes of local people and the parks authorities, and proceed with developments that do no fit in with the areas in question.

Some hon. Members have argued strongly for tight regulation of prices. Such regulations will pose the risk that companies will resort to maximising their assets by capitalising those assets—in this instance, land, often of scientific importance and natural beauty. The Bill poses a danger to conservation, public health and water quality. It also represents a missed opportunity of dealing with private sewers and giving water companies powers to step into estates such as Winchester avenue, make good the damage and bill the people responsible, rather than giving them rights to tender for contracts to do the same again to the public system.

9.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): The Minister of State found himself in rather a bad temper earlier—not for the first time, I would say. I do not intend to follow his example. I was, indeed, intending to start on a note of congratulation: the Secretary of State was absent for some of our debate this evening, and this time it was for a very

[Mrs. Ann Taylor]

good reason. He was attending the christening of his grandson—*[Interruption.]*—of his two grandchildren: I congratulate him doubly. I shall make the obvious comment: I trust that they were not christened with Perrier, which seems to be the Secretary of State's favourite.

This evening's debate has been interesting—despite being the culmination of many hours of discussion—not least because of the enlightening comment from the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) that water will be better in private hands because those who can afford it will be able to obtain the water that they need during a drought. That shows the market going to extremes.

A Third Reading debate is supposed to consider a Bill as it stands after Committee and Report stages. Considering the Government's attitude, however, it is not surprising that today's debate has been something of a repeat of the Second Reading debate in December. Throughout our proceedings, the Government have dug in their heels and refused to listen to reason or public opinion, or to take account of the practical considerations that formed the basis of our debates and amendments in Committee.

There are three basic reasons why we—and public opinion—oppose the Bill as it stands. The first is one of principle. When we talk about the water industry, we are talking about an industry that is vital to the individual health of each and every one of us. More than that, we are talking about the public health of the nation, and indeed the long-term health of future generations. That is one of the reasons why the public know the dangers of water privatisation better than the Government. They recognise that advances in water purity and the safe disposal of sewage have contributed more to improvements in health than many of the drugs and medicines that are given so much credit. Almost all of that has been done at public expense by public authorities—in the main by those bodies that the Government love to vilify, the local authorities.

The second reason why we opposed and still oppose the Bill is practical. Everyone knows, and we have always said, that investment is necessary to bring the industry up to scratch. We have had arguments about the level of investment under Labour and Conservative Governments, and I am happy to repeat them this evening. The facts are clear: the average level of investment under the last Labour Government was substantially higher than it has been under Conservative rule. Leaving that aside, and looking to the future, what is likely to produce more investment?

The Government argue that the private sector will provide more investment. Leaving aside the Chancellor of the Exchequer's comment that investment in the private sector will be more expensive—which must somewhat reduce the amount of investment that the industry will receive—will the private sector invest more to clean up our rivers, to tackle pollution, to clean up our beaches and to provide pure drinking water, free of aluminium and nitrates and, more expensive to achieve, free of lead?

What incentive will the private sector have to make that level of investment? What incentive will there be for the industry in private hands to invest an extra £1 billion to clean up the beaches an additional £3 billion to improve drinking water quality or an extra £9 billion to confirm with EEC directives? What extra return will investors receive from additional investment of that magnitude? Will the industry sell more water or dispose of more sewage? Of course it will not.

The return to the private investor will not be high enough unless the Government's flotation is done in such a way as to cheat the taxpayer and the consumer. Water authorities are supposed to be valuing their present assets and liabilities—not an easy task when, for example, the Yorkshire authority does not know the condition of 70 per cent. of its sewers and does not even know where 30 per cent of them are.

The sampling techniques which form that basis of the asset management plans which are being drawn up have been described to me by a statistician, consulted professionally about the issue, as nothing more than

"an attempt to obtain a statistical blessing on guesswork."

Anyone who buys into the industry will be buying a pig in a poke, which, on the basis of market forces, does not look that attractive. Indeed, the stockbrokers Seymour Pierce Butterfield Ltd. said in their report on the industry and privatisation:

"It is accepted that in terms of core operations, such as water supply, sewage treatment and disposal, growth is distinctly limited."

That does not sound an attractive proposition for the private investor. That, however, is the position before Government intervention. I say that because the one thing this so-called free market Government cannot do is let a privatisation of this kind flop. That is why they are busy interfering with and intervening in market forces, stacking the cards in favour of potential investors.

I am sure that we shall soon hear about proposals for debt write-off. The massive debts of the water industry will not be passed to the private sector. They will be met, as usual, by the taxpayer. We now have the Government's latest document for price-setting. That confirms what we discovered in Committee, which is that the initial round of price-fixing will be done by the Secretary of State and that the new regulator, the Director General of Water Services, will not be involved.

We heard today that the Secretary of State has appointed the first Director General of Water Services, the man who, according to the Government, will look after the interests of consumers. He is, the House will not be surprised to learn, a Treasury civil servant apparently with considerable experience of the rates of return of nationalised industries, but with no experience of looking after the interests of consumers.

That fits in with the Government's outlook generally, because when the first round of price-fixing takes place in the autumn, consumer representatives will not be consulted or have any input. Indeed, the document on price-fixing says:

"The primary duty will be to ensure that companies are able, in particular by securing reasonable returns on their capital, to finance the industry."

It goes on to say that subject to that duty will be a

"duty to ensure that the interests of customers are protected."

In other words, the duty to ensure the interests of customers, of consumers, is given only as a secondary duty, secondary to the job of securing reasonable returns on capital. That means that prices will be higher, investment costs will be passed directly to the consumer and, because the K factor in prices will reflect a basket of

charges, domestic consumers could end up subsidising industrial polluters. That is a long way from the principle that the polluter must pay.

The Government are interfering with market forces so that the industry will be more attractive to private investment. They are doing this in three ways. First, they are doing it with regard to debt write-off. We await the Minister's announcement, and if he does not intend to write off the debt, I hope that he will clarify the position by telling the House this evening that that is the case. The second way in which the Government intend to make this industry more attractive is by allowing higher prices once the industry is in the private sector, and by allowing cost pass through to the consumer. The third way in which they are making the industry attractive is by handing over to the private sector assets and powers that will inevitably be used against the public interest.

Looking again at the report of the stockbrokers and city analysts, one sees what they say of a private water industry:

"Low increases in earnings per share, limited potential for growth in dividends, and a semi-static market do not, at first sight, suggest an exciting investment. This is not a view, though, which is likely to be shared by a number of potential predators. Any company that could optimise the use of a water authority's client base by using it to expand the market for its existing products, perhaps in a related field, stands to benefit significantly. Companies in the chemical waste disposal and heavy construction sectors might find particular attractions in bidding for privatised water industries."

There we have a summary of what this Bill is all about. The words of the City analysts are "potential predators". They are the people who have their eyes on this industry; they are the people who will make most out of it once it goes into the private sector.

We do not want to see, and the public do not want to see, a water industry that is owned by chemical companies and construction companies, yet these are the very companies identified by the City analysts as most likely to be interested in buying into this industry. If water companies are to be owned by chemical companies, and then those water companies are to contract out the analysis work of the NRA, the NRA will become a farce. The likes of Mr. Court of South West Water will be well on their way to achieving their objective of outwitting the regulators, and the chemical companies, or other polluting companies, will be well on their way to ensuring that the polluter does not pay.

Of course, there is also the land issue. Of the land, the city analysts say:

"Water authorities with significant amounts of surplus land may well realise sizeable capital gains by selling it."

Of course, the new water plcs will be given that land when the industry is sold, so that they may realise those gains. To asset-strip and take the gain of the land values wherever possible is certainly the objective of those companies.

Another development has become clear—and I hope that the Minister will confirm the reports that have appeared in the press. It has become clear that the Government have decided to give important planning powers to the new water companies. These private companies will be able to decide whether a building development will have adequate water supply and sewerage facilities. How very convenient for the construction companies that buy up water companies and get 500,000 acres of land, much of it in areas of outstanding natural beauty. The construction companies will decide land values and where development should take place. That is one of the reasons why the French are interested.

If the price of the industry when flotation takes place is low enough and if enough bribes are given, the water industry will be sold. If that happens, the consequences will be with us for many years to come. Fortunately, the public realise what this is all about. The public, like the Opposition, want a water industry that is accountable not to the shareholder but to the consumer. That is why they want us to vote against the Bill.

9.45 pm

The Minister for Water and Planning (Mr. Michael Howard): One of the last points made by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) was typical of the Opposition's approach to the Bill. There is no truth whatever in her suggestion that the water companies will be given powers over development. The position will not change. The water companies will have a duty to provide infrastructure for development and they will have a right to be consulted, just as they have at the moment. That was an absolutely typical example of the way in which the Opposition have sought to mislead, exaggerate, scaremonger and play upon people's fears.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I have already dealt with the hon. Lady's point.

The Bill has been discussed in Standing Committee and on the Floor of the House for over 187 hours. The last few hours have been as interesting as ever. I shall deal at the outset with another example of scaremongering by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry). He suggested that, contrary to earlier assurances, workers in the industry will not be provided with a pension scheme that includes index-linking. That is not so. They will be entitled to terms, through the mirror image scheme, that will be exactly similar to those in the local government superannuation scheme. It will be at the same cost to employees and it will include index-linking. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will return to his sponsor, NUPE, and ask it to put the matter right and tell the truth to its members who are employees in the industry so that they are not misled.

In his interesting speech my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) based his opposition to our proposals on what he saw as the lack of competition in the industry. With respect to my hon. Friend, I think that he exaggerated the competition that exists in the telecommunications and gas industries and underestimated the extent to which the Director General of Water Services will be able, by comparing the performance of different companies in the water industry, to ensure that the standards of the most efficient spread to the rest of the industry and that the customers of the industry benefit from the greater efficiency. I am confident that in due course he will see the merit of what we are suggesting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) again expressed his fears about disconnections. He expressed those fears many times in Committee. We are still considering his suggestion that disconnections should take place only after a court order. However, we have decided that the disconnections code should be subject to

[Mr. Howard]

the approval of the director general. That was one of the points in which he was interested. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) raised a number of interesting points, which we shall look at carefully.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) and my hon. Friends the Members for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison) and for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) —whose speech I was sorry to miss—expressed concern about the strength of powers and the independence of the National Rivers Authority. We shall take care to ensure that the National Rivers Authority is an independent body and that is has the powers that are in the Bill for all to see, as well as the resources that it needs to do its job properly.

I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Woking that the National Rivers Authority has the duties for which he pressed. We think it right that it should have a discretion when it comes to decide to what extent it is appropriate to take samples, but its duties will be supervised by the Secretary of State, who can issue directions to the authority and whose exercise of that supervisory power is itself subject to supervision in the courts.

The National Rivers Authority is in many ways the cornerstone of our proposals, and it has presented Opposition Members with something of a quandary. It is so obviously a good idea, and so obviously a body that is badly needed that even Opposition Members have found it difficult to attack. Sometimes they have taken refuge in attacking not the proposals contained in the Bill but the proposals contained in the arrangements which were previously proposed for the industry and which were withdrawn by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Perhaps the true attitude towards the National Rivers Authority was let slip—as the true attitude of the Opposition so often is—by the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts) when he was winding up our debate on 22 March. The hon. Gentleman sneeringly and derisively referred to a description of the National Rivers Authority provided by my right hon. and noble Friend Lord Crickhowell, who will be its first chairman. Lord Crickhowell had referred to the need to operate

"a slim, efficient, cost conscious organisation".

To the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that was a description worthy of derision. He would no doubt prefer a bloated, inefficient, extravagant organisation—an organisation of the kind which was so typical of the Opposition's years in government. Indeed, it was during those years that we saw the remarkable triple achievement of massive increases in water charges, massive increases in staff and a halving of capital investment in sewerage.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: On the specific point of the size and resources of the NRA, surely the Minister should support our earlier amendments which would have given the NRA sufficient resources and powers to do its job properly. If it is to be the slim organisation about which he spoke, that is why it has to contract out so much of its work back to the water plcs.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady has made that charge before; there is no substance to it. In eight of the 10 regions there will be no contracting out to laboratories. There will be no contracting out of sampling in any of the 10 regions and we shall respect the safeguards that the National Rivers Authority advisory committee has put forward to safeguard its independence.

Of course, when pressed about the undoubted achievements and advantages of the Bill, Opposition Members say—this is the kernel and crux of the argument —that it is not necessary in order to achieve these advantages for the industry to be transferred to the private sector. All these advantages can be achieved, they say, while keeping it in the public sector.

This is a straightforward proposition. It is, moreover, a proposition which can be tested. It can be tested against the record of the Labour party when in Government; it can be tested against the record of this Government. What the Opposition have never done is to make it clear which, if either, of these tests gives them any confidence that the argument which they advance is a sound one. That argument can hardly be said, even by Opposition Members, to survive the test of the industry's performance while their party was in government.

We know—the figures are incontrovertible—that capital investment in the industy fell by one third during the Opposition's period in Government. Investment in sewage and sewerage services fell by no less than one half. That fall continued during the period when the right hon. and noble Lord Callaghan of Cardiff was Prime Minister in an Administration in which the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) served successively as parliamentary private secretary to the Prime Minister and as a Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department of Industry.

One might have expected that those cuts would have been marked by great heart searching on the part of the Government who were responsible for them. It might have been expected that the most anxious consideration would be given to the effects of those cuts on our rivers, on our bathing waters and on our water environment generally. I turned for enlightenment to the autobiography of Lord Callaghan, so aptly entitled "Time and Chance". I turned to the index of the book. Do we find there page after page of reference to anguished discussions on the future of the water industry, and on the effects on the industry of those cuts? I fear not.

I looked under water; there was not a single reference. I looked under sewage and sewerage services; not a single reference. So far from being accompanied by a gnashing of teeth or a wringing of hands, or indeed any realisation of the damage that was being done to our water environment, those cuts were made without any mention, without any regret, without any realisation of the enormous damage that they would do.

I thought that perhaps the then Prime Minister was too busy on grander matters to have concerned himself with these minutiae, and I was anxious to be fair to the Labour party, so I turned to the memoirs of Lord Barnet, who was Chief Secretary at the time. I looked in the index of his book for a reference to water; there was not a single one. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Howard: I looked under sewerage services; there was not a single reference. But, to be fair to the right hon. Gentleman and the Labour party, there were some references which were relevant to this subject. There were three—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Boateng: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can it possibly be in order for this tour around the memoirs of previous distinguished members of the Labour party to be made at this stage of the Bill? Is it any more in order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is being said is in order.

Mr. Howard: This is a test of the policy which the Labour party is putting forward. I found three references of some relevance to this matter in the memoirs of Lord Barnet under the heading "Water workers strike spy". On page 169 of the book, under the evocative chapter heading "Gloom and doom", we read:

"There was unofficial action of a most damaging kind in the water industry, with many homes without water and elderly people having to use stand pipes."

That was what was happening in the water industry under the Labour party almost exactly 10 years ago.

If the Labour party's attitude does not pass that test, let me suggest another test to the Opposition. They can hardly say that they wish their policies to be subjected to a test of what has happened while the present Government have been in office. We say that matters have improved under the present Government, but——

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order? Very well.

Mr. Spearing: Is it not a fact, Mr. Speaker, that the Third Reading debate is confined to the contents of the Bill?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the Minister is talking about the Bill.

Mr. Howard: What I am talking about is the policy which is at the heart of the Bill and the Labour party's opposition to that policy. Labour Members are advancing a policy which has consistently failed to give the people of this country the water environment to which they are entitled. It failed while the Labour party was in power and it has not done as well as it should have done while the present Government have been in power because the only way in which we can get the resources necessary to give this country the water environment it needs is by putting the industry in the private sector, and giving it access to private sector resources to enable it to operate with the efficiency which the private sector will provide. That is what the Bill provides. That is the only way in which we shall achieve the advantages that are so essential if we are to proceed with the clean-up of the water environment which all the people of our country wish to see.

The hon. Member for Copeland has repeatedly said that the Labour party will return the industry to the public sector. He does not seem to be in the confidence of his hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) who keeps leaking to the newspapers the fact that the Labour party will not return the industry to the public sector. No doubt that is why the hon. Member for Copeland said that he was willing to set out all the answers to the questions that have been put. However, that will not be in this debate, but in a speech that he will make in a few weeks. He has not told the House the Opposition policy during our debates on the Bill but says that he will wait for a few weeks before doing so. That is a measure of the contempt with which the hon. Gentleman treats the House. I invite the House to treat the Opposition tactics on the Bill with similar contempt and to give the Bill the Third Reading it so eminently deserves.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 227.

Division No. 137] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard

Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron

Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Sir Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Resolved,

That, at this day's sitting, the Ways and Means Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Electricity Bill [Money] (No. 2)

Queen's recommendation having been signified—
Motion made and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Electricity Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making loans to successor companies in England and Wales which are for the time being wholly owned by the Crown, so long as the aggregate of any amounts outstanding by way of principal in respect of such loans and sums issued out of the Consolidated Fund for fulfilling guarantees given by the Treasury in respect of sums borrowed by such companies from persons other than the Secretary of State shall not exceed £2,000 million;

(2) the payment out of the Consolidated Fund of any sums required by the Treasury for fulfilling guarantees given by them in respect of sums borrowed from persons other than the Secretary of State by successor companies in England and Wales which are for the time being wholly owned by the Crown.

In this resolution "successor company" has the same meaning as in Part II of that Act.—*[Mr. Norman Lamont.]*

10.18 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am very grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity of raising a number of questions about this money resolution, because I think the procedures of the House are remiss in one or two circumstances. One is in examining statutory instruments and the other is in examining the enormous sums of money which this House authorises. I have a number of questions, which I hope the Minister is briefed to take account of. The first is that paragraph (1) of the money resolution suggests that the payment out of the national loans fund can be made to successive companies in England and Wales, for the time being wholly owned by the Crown, up to a total of £2 billion. That is an enormous sum of money and I would be pleased to learn the terms of that loan from the Minister.

I imagine that the purpose of this money resolution is to take account of questions that have arisen in Committee, because the first money resolution does not cover expenditure which the Government now feel is required. The expenditure that we are considering is of some £2,000 million by way of loan. Will that loan be open-ended? I imagine that it will be subject to the Treasury's consent. What terms and conditions will the Treasury lay down?

Can the Minister clarify the position? Is this a way of handing over up to £2,000 million to the corporations which are, for the time being, wholly owned by the Crown, before they are taken over by successor companies—in effect, handing over this enormous sum of taxpayers' money direct to the Government's cronies who will purchase the electricity generating companies?

I am wholly opposed to the privatisation of the electricity industry.

Mr. Denis Skinner (Bolsover): What sum are we talking about?

Mr. Cryer: We are not talking about a supplement of 2 per cent. or 3 per cent. to recipients of supplementary benefit; or the purchase of the House of Fraser. That could be bought three times with this amount. We are talking about £2,000 million.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is marginally wrong. The House of Fraser was not bought with real money. According to the report issued by the Department of

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Trade and Industry, which has not been released to the public, it was purchased through fraud and deceit with what it called funny money.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The Government have been giving licence to such tactics in the City. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry suggests that the report has been withheld from publication to avoid any difficulties in prosecution, but I think that it is because the Government want to cover the whole thing up. In this enterprise culture, large chunks of public assets are being taken from the public. The public are being robbed by this procedure. Assets are being taken from the citizenry and handed over to a clique of the Government's cronies. In those circumstances, it behoves Parliament to know exactly what conditions will be laid down for this loan of £2,000 million.

We have heard before from Department of Trade and Industry reports about loans from company directors to associated companies in which no time limits have been laid down for the repayment of loans. They have been open-ended. I want an assurance from the Government that the loans will be properly laid out, with arrangements for repayment. I want an assurance that we will not have another Blue Arrow situation, with virtually open-ended loans. I want an assurance that the taxpayer will not be left empty-handed as a result of the authorisation of this £2,000 million loan tonight.

I hope that the Minister can give me such an assurance. I am sure that he will agree that, in this enterprise culture, private firms must stand on their own feet and not be feather-bedded by loans of £2,000 million from the taxpayer. I take it that all the Government's cronies who are buying these companies are sturdy entrepreneurs who, if they were offered £2,000 million in loans from the taxpayer, would reject it as out of line with their philosophy.

Mr. Skinner: Some privatisation deals did not work out in the way that the Government anticipated. In the beginning—with British Gas, and so on—it was easy, but my hon. Friend will recall that in the case of British Petroleum, the Government underwrote the shares, with the result that the Kuwait Investment Office started buying most of BP. The Government became scared and said, "Just a minute. All of BP is being bought by people who are friends of the Al-Fayeds, who bought the House of Fraser." Consequently, the Government stepped in and asked, "Can we have those shares back? We shall give you more money to take them off your hands." It could be that the £2,000 million is only a tiny proportion of what might eventually materialise.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend suggests that both the Government and private entrepreneurs can be greedy, unprincipled and unscrupulous. That takes my breath away. There is a suggestion that the Government are using £2,000 million of taxpayers' money when they claim that they are the guardian of the taxpayers' money. I want a complete and adequate explanation of why it is that that £2,000 million is needed.

I see the Chief Secretary to the Treasury sitting smugly on the Government Front Bench, apparently viewing with equanimity the disappearance of £2,000 million in loans in pursuit of privatisation. Yesterday, I visited one of the schools in my constituency where a temporary classroom in the schoolyard has been temporary so long that its plywood panels are warping off. That school has been waiting for a new classroom for two years, yet a £2,000 million loan cannot be found to improve schools across the length and breadth of the country. Nevertheless, £2,000 million can be found to facilitate the handing over of publicly owned assets to the Government's cronies. The Government's priorities need some explaining.

Mr. Skinner: The privatisation of electricity takes account of nuclear power. In order to sell off the nuclear ingredient, the Government have had to wrap it up in coal. It is ironic that the Government are running down the coal industry but cannot sell off nuclear shares on their own, but must cover them up with coal. Consequently, the Government may not be able to sell those shares as well as they thought. Many people will fight shy of buying nuclear shares, even if they are wrapped in coal. The Government need that £2,000 million because they are not sure how well they can sell those shares.

In charge is a Minister who could not even sell computers to the Conservative Party. They all broke down. The entire Tycom computer network serving the Tory constituency parties could not be made to operate, and the whole firm went bankrupt. One can understand why this latest measure is costing the country £2,000 million.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his illuminating comments. He makes a relevant point. One questions whether that £2,000 million is a form of subsidy from a Government who oppose the principle of subsidies. As my hon. Friend says, the cost of nuclear power is enormous. The nation has been cheated. We were told by the overpaid decision makers in the electricity generating industry that nuclear power would be cheaper. It has turned out that that is not the case.

We cannot calculate the precise cost of decommissioning a nuclear power station, so we are faced with expenditure of several thousand million pounds just for decommissioning. The Secretary of State for Energy is here. If he has any hard facts that he can contribute to the discussion on the cost of decommissioning, I would be happy to hear his comments. But, of course, he has none: they are entirely unknown.

It may well be that the Minister wants this authorisation in order to hand over £2 billion to help the privatised industry to embark on the decommissioning process. I have been asking a few questions about decommissioning and the cost of running nuclear power stations, the cost of repairs and percentage availability; and it is a pretty appalling story. Yet the Government are proposing privatisation.

In view of Three Mile Island and the fact that the American nuclear power industry has not commissioned a new nuclear power generating plant since before Three Mile Island, because of the enormous cost of investment in nuclear power, it may well be that the sort of money that is being authorised here is to cushion the privatisation process and lure the shareholders into taking up the option the Government are providing. If they do not, the Government and, in particular, the Secretary of State for Energy, will be shown to be as dismal failures as we believe them to be and their policies the disaster that we know them to be.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): My hon. Friend will be aware that, while this money resolution talks about £2,000 million, the Bill itself, particularly paragraph 88 of schedule 12, shows that the Secretary of State has the ability to write off any debt that is incurred up to the point of privatisation. This may not, therefore, be a £2,000 million loan at all; it may be a £2,000 million gift.

Mr. Cryer: That is a very interesting observation by my hon. Friend. I was coming to paragraph 88 of schedule 12 in a moment, but he has anticipated my remarks. There is, however, a second section of the resolution which refers to guarantees by the Treasury in respect of loans, and paragraph 88 of schedule 12 also impinges on this.

I should be very interested to learn from the Minister what sort of guarantees the Treasury will give. Will they be open-ended guarantees in which they hand over a guarantee against borrowing to the privatised companies through the successor companies? Will the successor companies carry with them from the companies which are, for the time being, under this resolution, wholly owned by the Crown, the Treasury guarantees in addition to the loans? Once the companies that are wholly owned by the Crown have been wound up and have disappeared, and once the successor companies have taken over, what is the position with regard to, first of all, loans under paragraph (1) of the resolution and, second, the guarantees under paragraph (2)?

We should be very wary of guarantees given by the Government on behalf of the taxpayers, because they amount to a guarantee that payment will be made by the taxpayers if there is a default on a repayment. That is surely something that we should look at. After all, when constituency Members like myself ask the Government for more money to provide better payments for people who are at the very poorest end of the scale, the Government say that they cannot afford it because it would cost another £10 million, £15 million or £20 million a year. So they cannot give family credit on a better basis or transitional payments for pensioners, which would be the guarantee after the cuts on 11 April last year—the new, savage cuts because the Government were short of money. They could not provide transitional payments very effectively.

One of my constituents, indeed, is still waiting for payment, having applied a year ago. It seems that, while the ordinary citizen has considerable difficulty in getting a few hundred quid out of the Government, a successor company may have its pockets lined with £2 billion-worth of loans and some guarantees as well.

It is not the first time that this has happened. British Leyland was sold off to British Aerospace—a company with assets worth some £750 million—for £150 million, and BAe was given £500 million to put in its pocket.

Mr. Skinner: They did it with Harland and Wolff, too.

Mr. Cryer: They have done exactly the same with Harland and Wolff.

Mr. Skinner: But not Sunderland.

Mr. Cryer: Not Sunderland. They are quite happy to see 2,000 workers there shoved on the scrapyard and into the dole queue.

It is worth pointing out that £2,000 million was put into British Leyland by successive Governments to retain jobs and an indigenous motor vehicle industry. It is important to raise such questions in the light of the £2,000 million mentioned in the resolution.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Can the hon. Gentleman equate that with the £4 million a day that was poured into British Coal under the Labour Government?

Mr. Cryer: I have always thought that an economy should aim to provide the community at large with resources, including the provision of work. Between 1974 and 1979, the Labour Government used their best endeavours to provide work. During their 10 years in office, the present Government have never achieved the low level of unemployment that they inherited. It has been higher each year. The truth is that they do not care about shoving people on to the dole.

Mr. Skinner: When hon. Members start talking about subsidies, they cannot travel much further than the subsidies to the Common Market and the common agricultural policy. My hon. Friend knows a bit about that. He knows that £16 a week for every family in Britain goes in subsidy to prop up the West German farmers and the rest of them. We have now discovered that some £6,000 million-worth of fraud—three times as much as the figure in the resolution——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will not be deflected from the money resolution.

Mr. Skinner: When we talk about money and subsidies —like the £2,000 million referred to here as "loans"—let us think about what we could do with it to provide security for the railways and airports: the sort of security that the Prime Minister was given when she went up to Scarborough. If there was any left over, we could give it to the pensioners and the National Health Service.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his contribution. There is a legitimate argument for subsidies to retain jobs. The present Government use that argument in Northern Ireland. Because, they say, it is an area of high unemployment and because there is strife and trouble there, Northern Ireland has the highest level of subsidy per job in the United Kingdom. The argument adduced by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) that subsidy is somehow wrong is simply not based on facts. If I recall correctly, the hon. Gentleman is something of a Euro-fanatic. I am not absolutely sure, because many Tory Members are very similar: they are clones, and it is sometimes hard to distinguish one from another.

The £2,000 million-worth of loans and guarantees is not specified in the resolution, but payment may be made

"out of the Consolidated Fund for fulfilling guarantees given by the Treasury in respect of sums borrowed . . . from persons other than the Secretary of State".

So they are getting £2 billion-worth of loans from the Secretary of State and guarantees for loans from other institutions.

The Government, who are giving potential subsidies to their cronies whom they hope to persuade to buy the publicly funded electricity generating industry, have given between 1984 and 1987 a total of £4·7 billion to the Common Market, yet they claim to be against subsidies.

Local authorities go cap in hand trying to get back a tiny fraction of that sum, most of which, as my hon. Friend

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the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) pointed out, went to the farming community, including to cereal farmers in this country. When I see the serried ranks of the Tory party standing up and criticising farmers for receiving subsidies, then I will know that there has been a change of heart on their part.

Mr. Ashby: If the hon. Gentleman is not opposed to the provision of money to provide jobs, why is he opposing this Bill?

Mr. Cryer: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that privatisation will create more jobs? The only jobs that this measure will create will be in the advertising agencies used by the Government, in the finance houses which facilitate the placing of shares and in the paper chase that will occur in the City, although the number of jobs so created will be but a fraction of the number of jobs that have been lost in the City. But no real jobs will be created in genuine services that ordinary people can use. Every privatisation has started with claims of rationalisation but has ended with more people being put on the dole.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I confirm what my hon. Friend says about job losses arising from privatisation. Indeed, 85 jobs have disappeared in the past week through a voluntary redundancy scheme at Aberthaw A and B power station, the main power station in south Wales.

Mr. Cryer: Society must provide an opportunity for people to train and improve and a chance for our young people to find jobs. The money that is being provided under this measure could be used, for example, to improve import facilities at docks so that cheap coal from South Africa, brought out of that country on the bloody backs of black miners——

Mr. Ashby: Oh, dear.

Mr. Cryer: It is all very well for Conservative Members to make such remarks, but, then, some of them will have been on free trips to Namibia and South Africa, paid for by the propaganda merchants in the South African Government.

We are concerned at the thought that the British Government have been deliberately planning to destroy village communities around the pits in every major region in this country as part of a planned vendetta against the coal industry and the NUM. The Government's cronies, who share their vindictive and nasty values, would not hesitate to import coal from anywhere that people are exploited if that would make the electricity generating industry what they call competitive. The publicly owned electricity generating industry is competitive and well organised. As a matter of fact, that was recognised in the 1920s: the standardised electricity generating system and the national grid were actually introduced by Conservative Governments, who recognised the virtue of public ownership.

Of course, this Government recognise the virtue of public ownership in the case of certain public services. For instance, they have not yet arranged to sell the Army off to Securicor. If the standard of competitive endeavour is good enough for the electricity industry, why not for the Royal Air Force? Why should not the RAF be sold off to British Midland and the Royal Navy to P and O? After all, P and O is one of the great heroes of the Conservative party, and it pours money into the Conservative coffers. Do not the Government think that that company could run the Navy better, or is it just that a public service provides a more effective and efficient defence of this country?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is moving into an area of privatisation based on what could happen next. He has referred to the armed forces. Is he aware that the Government have already made inroads into the police in that respect? They have introduced an element of privatisation in respect of people being transported from remand centres and so on. As a result, a police review that is given to every Member of Parliament—unlike the Department of Trade and Industry report on the selling off of Harrods—shows that the police are seething because they realise that this is a dilution of their jobs. Now the Police Federation is supposed to be taking——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) will stick to the money resolution.

Mr. Cryer: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) for illuminating the debate once again with a very apt comment. We are talking about £2,000 million in loans and, in addition, open-ended guarantees for loans from sources other than the Treasury. This is a very important matter.

Conservative Members claim that there is no particular virtue in public ownership. All that I am saying—in a very brief and reasonable way—by way of explanation, is that the Government are not selling off the Navy, the Army and the Air Force. That must be because they see virtue in public ownership of those forces. Labour Members say that public ownership is an important principle, and that it is a disgrace that public assets are being sold off and put beyond the control of this House.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If the armed forces were put out for privatisation, or to competitive tendering, would the hon. Member care to speculate what the Government's attitude would be were the Red Army to put in the lowest tender?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that, again, the hon. Member for Bradford, South will not be tempted to answer a question which is well away from the money resolution.

Mr. Cryer: What I am concerned about, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rightly imply, is this £2,000 million by way of loan that British citizens are handing over to some corporations wholly owned by the Crown. We want to know what will be done with this money when the successor companies take over and follow the evil pattern of this Government. The Government have announced that when an organisation is put out to tender, by and large it is sold to any comer. So my hon. Friend's illustration is very neat: if the Army were to be sold off, we could get Russian domination by another route. That is something that I did not think of when the Government spent £11,000 million on Trident nuclear weapons to deal with the very sort of domination that they could let in by the back door—by selling off the Army.

There is also the question of control. The Minister is making notes and civil servants are ready to provide him with additional information about the issues that we have raised. When the successor companies take over, all that will disappear. It will become a Treasury matter. Ministers will not have to sit here listening to speeches by me and other Opposition Members. Public accountability will be removed. That is wrong.

Even with a publicly owned electricity industry, the position is unsatisfactory. If we table parliamentary questions, we are told that they have been forwarded to the chairman of the CEGB, and we get a letter from a public relations merchant who says that nuclear power is not quite so expensive as it seems; it is just that we have been spending an enormous amount of money on it. That is not good enough, even in today's terms.

After privatisation we shall be unable to ask questions about the successor companies that are mentioned in the resolution. When loans are given not to the wholly owned corporation but to the successor companies, parliamentary questions about those companies will not be answered in full by Ministers. The purpose of successor companies is to remove public accountability. The spivs and crooks who rule in the City with such seedy generosity towards the Conservative party are thought by the Government to be fit people to take over this enormous industry that is so crucial to the people of this country. Townsend Thoresen directors may become directors of the successor companies. They could be steering the nuclear ship to Zeebrugge, with disastrous consequences for us all.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): My hon. Friend will be aware that foreigners will be allowed to buy into our electricity industry. They too will enjoy this subsidy. Is my hon. Friend also aware that some of those foreigners could be put up as a front to buy into the industry? A foreign country that supported terrorism could end up in possession of a nuclear power station. How about that?

Mr. Cryer: I am alarmed about it. There have been lots of links between private enterprise companies and Colonel Gaddafi. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover will recall the vitriolic criticism that money was being collected in Libya for the miners. There was a torrent of abuse, yet the Government appear to be opening the door to Libyans to buy into the industry.

I make no distinction between British people and foreigners, but I am concerned about capitalists, wherever they come from, getting hold of a public asset. In the words of the people who sold shares in the 1956 bank rate leak scandal, it is anti-British and derogatory to sterling, but it makes sense to me. They are the people who wrap themselves in the Union Jack and sell Britain down the river, if they think that they can make more money out of it.

The Minister has some questions to answer about the resolution. I do not intend to take up too much time because I want to give the Minister time in which to respond to the debate. I remind the House that as this legislation continues down its slimy path through Parliament, its disreputable origins and aims mean that the opportunities for Members to ask these questions are diminishing all the time.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) *rose*——

10.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Mr. Michael Spicer.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has made his traditional money resolution speech for which he is in the process of making himself world famous——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is not customary to allow hon. Members who wish to speak to do so before the Minister speaks, so that he can answer their questions?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister has risen, and I have called him.

Mr. Spicer: As I understand it, I have only just over six minutes in which to answer the questions, to which the House deserves at least some sort of answer——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your ruling. I had understood that it was normal practice to allow hon. Members who rise to speak in a debate to be heard, and to call the Minister last——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The normal practice is that if a Minister rises, he is called by the Chair. The House must bear in mind the fact that time is now very limited.

Mr. Spicer: Perhaps I can help the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) by letting him intervene in my speech, although that will take some time out of it. I feel that, as the hon. Member for Bradford, South spoke for 40 minutes or so, I should give him the answer he is looking for.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South was right about one thing: the resolution enables the provision of an upper limit on the industry's borrowing of £2,000 million while it remains in the public sector. But I thought that the hon. Gentleman missed something. He talked about the Government giving the money away to their cronies, by which I imagine he meant ultimately the British people. That is his definition of privatisation, not mine.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the figure is £2,000 million. The best way to answer that is to remind him that the latest published figure for the industry's borrowings is £1·6 billion, so the £2 billion must be seen in that context. I cannot refrain from reminding hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee on the Electricity Bill that some of them had reservations at that stage about whether we had provided for adequate borrowing during the period before the industry is privatised.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The fundamental question to which the House is entitled to know the answer is what has happened since Second Reading to warrant the measure before the House. After Second Reading the House voted for a money resolution of £6 billion, although my party voted against it and will vote against this one. What has happened to justify the authorisation of £2 billion more borrowing in this short space of time?

Mr. Spicer: One of the things that has happened is that we have decided that the industry in England and Wales shall be able to borrow with Treasury guarantees. That is

[Mr. Spicer]

connected with the fact that we shall allow the industry to borrow short in order to re-finance the long-term borrowing that we shall insist it pays back. We shall discuss that under the ways and means motion.

Another aspect that was openly discussed in Committee, and to which I alerted it, is that as we approach the vesting of these companies, estimates of borrowing become much clearer. The moneys are comparable with existing borrowing levels. To answer the hon. Member for Bradford, South, the borrowing will be subject to Treasury consent. It will cease—the hon. Gentleman did not appear to take this on board—on flotation of the companies in the private sector. The Treasury guarantees, also covered by the resolution, will cease when the successor companies are floated.

I wanted to intervene to answer those specific points raised by the hon. Gentleman. There is nothing untoward about the money resolution. It provides for moneys absolutely in line with the present borrowing of the industry within the public sector. How the hon. Gentleman can make a 35 to 40-minute speech relating this to his prejudices about privatisation I am not quite sure, but I certainly wish to commend the resolution.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 185, Noes 57.

Division No. 138] **[11.00 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAllion, John
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Nellist, Dave
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Sir Cyril *(Rochdale)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James

Walley, Joan
Wilson, Brian
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. George J. Buckley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Electricity Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of the National Loans Fund of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making loans to successor companies in England and Wales which are for the time being wholly owned by the Crown, so long as the aggregate of any amounts outstanding by way of principal in respect of such loans and sums issued out of the Consolidated Fund for fulfilling guarantees given by the Treasury in respect of sums borrowed by such companies from persons other than the Secretary of State shall not exceed £2,000 million;

(2) the payment out of the Consolidated Fund of any sums required by the Treasury for fulfilling guarantees given by them in respect of sums borrowed from persons other than the Secretary of State by successor companies in England and Wales which are for the time being wholly owned by the Crown.

In this resolution "successor company" has the same meaning as in part II of that Act.

Electricity Bill [Ways and Means] (No. 2)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Electricity Bill, it is expedient to authorise the giving of directions requiring the Electricity Council, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board or the South of Scotland Electricity Board—

(a) to make payments to the Secretary of State in respect of advances made by him to the Council or Board;

(b) to make payments to the Treasury in respect of loans to the Council or Board made wholly or mainly in currencies other than sterling.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

11.11 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I shall be brief, but it seems astonishing that when we have already debated the Second Reading of the Electricity Bill, when we have been through the full Committee stage and when we are approaching the Report stage, we should have a new money resolution and a new Ways and Means resolution. If Labour Members had not been ready to ask questions, the Government were prepared to nod the motions through without any explanation.

I hope that it will not be the junior Minister from the Department of Energy who will reply to this debate but that it will be a Minister of State, Scottish Office. The Ways and Means resolution covers the Electricity Council, but it also covers the two Scottish boards. The money resolution did not cover the Scottish successor companies. I hope that a Minister will be forthcoming in explaining exactly what is going on—*[Interruption.]* I know that hon. Members who stand at the Bar do not like to listen to debates; perhaps it would be better if they were to leave the Chamber.

In his previous speech the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy tried to suggest that the Ways and Means resolution was a follow-on from the money resolution. So far as I understood what he was saying, the money resolution provided for the loan of money to the companies and the Ways and Means resolution was giving the Government the means to take that money back at a later date.

If we read the money resolution we find, first, that it does not cover Scotland at all but covers only the English and Welsh successor companies, and secondly, that it refers to successor companies and to the money that will be lent to successor companies while they are owned wholly by the Secretary of State. The Ways and Means resolution is entirely about the Electricity Council, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board and the South of Scotland electricity board. It does not refer at all to the successor companies. So far as I can see, it has no effect on the successor companies. I hope that a Minister will manage to explain exactly what is meant by that.

As I read the Ways and Means motion, it states that the Electricity Council, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board and the South of Scotland electricity board will be required to repay loans made by the Secretary of State. Perhaps the Minister can explain what the second part of the motion relating to "currencies other than sterling" means. That requirement will presumably cease after 1 January 1990, when the boards and the Electricity Council will disappear and the successor companies take their places. What does the Minister mean by that? What moneys are to be repaid, to whom, and how much is involved?

11.15 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): This second motion relating to the Electricity Bill coming just before the Report stage underlines the extraordinary way in which the Bill is progressing through the House. The money resolution that we have just debated and this motion introduce significant changes which I find it hard to believe that the Government were not aware of when they brought the Bill before the House only a few weeks ago. The Ways and Means resolution raises a number of questions and requires clarification.

We have regrettably just approved a borrowing consent for an extra £2 billion and we are now asked to pass a Ways and Means resolution under which

"the Electricity Council, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board or the South of Scotland Electricity Board"

can

"make payments to the Secretary of State in respect of advances made"

and also make them in relation to loans made

"in currencies other than sterling."

We are entitled to know what kind of loans we are talking about and their scale. What is the time scale of the loans and what are they for?

At the moment significant changes are occurring almost weekly in the industry which the Government are trying to privatise. The industry is moving the goal posts and the Government are running around in all directions, rather like headless chickens, trying to respond to those changes.

In Committee I made a suggestion, which did not command widespread support, that as the SSEB had 110 per cent. excess capacity, it could do worse than sell one of its power stations to a company in England—and I suggested Torness. I received a letter from the chief executive of the SSEB saying that my suggestion was outrageous and irresponsible and that the SSEB would need the capacity. However, last week the SSEB announced that it was to close Hunterston A prematurely because it could not find a market for the electricity that it generated.

Will the Minister tell us whether the moneys that are moving backwards and forwards, as described in the motion, relate to the extra early costs of decommissioning the Hunterston A power station which, until recently, the SSEB claimed had still a few years to run? I refer to that station to show how muddled and confused the industry is.

I notice that over the past few days there has been confusion in the west country. It appears that the Central Electricity Generating Board is applying to build a large new 1,200 MW pressurised water reactor generating station. However, it has cancelled an order for a coal-fired station in the same region.

One can question the legitimacy of applying to build one kind of power station, closing others down prematurely and arguing that we need extra capacity when the present capacity cannot actually be deployed. It is apparent that, even in the existing state of the market, there is over-capacity. Of course, with an imaginative Government pursuing an imaginative programme, we could use the existing capacity much more efficiently and have no need to build new power stations of any description.

The question the Minister has to address is whether the Ways and Means resolution is before the House because the dynamics of the industry are changing as we look at it. No doubt to some extent the Secretary of State, having proudly produced his package of inspired duopoly as a retort to the monopoly of previous privatisations, is finding that the composition of the industry that he is proposing to create in advance of privatisation is actually changing before the flotation date and that, consequently, the industry's financial requirements, the repayment zones, the deals it is doing and the currencies it is doing them in are all changing in the light of those new circumstances.

Over the next few days we shall have a detailed debate on the Report stage of the Electricity Bill and no doubt some of these issues can be discussed more fully then, but I think that the Government have shattered any confidence that they are in control of the Bill, because we have before us a clear indication that they are not in control and they are having to make major changes as the Bill goes through the House, Indeed, in a few weeks' time the Bill will no doubt come back from another place with even more unrecognisable amendments which have never even been debated in this place, because, we will be told, the circumstances have changed.

I hope that the Minister will be able to give some reasonable and satisfactory answers, and I hope that he will accept that we are now faced with an indication of a Government and a Department out of control of their legislation.

11.21 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I would like to make a few brief remarks on the question of the giving of directions. The Ways and Means resolution authorises directions to be issued by a Minister to make payments to the Secretary of State and to make payments to the Treasury. Can the Minister tell us, for example, why it was not thought necessary to include statutory instruments in the legislation to give regulatory powers to the Minister? I say this because, if we take this at face value, the Minister can give any directions he chooses in relation to the money. The great virtue of the statutory instrument, whether using the negative procedure or, preferably, the affirmative procedure, is that it actually comes before this House.

As I understand it, these directions will simply be issued by the Minister. They will not be public documents. We shall not know what is going on. They will not be subject to any scrutiny or vote. The procedure of statutory instruments is lamentable enough in its accountability, but at least it exists. There is the opportunity for a prayer to be laid and for a debate to take place, albeit for an hour and a half, or, on the affirmative procedure, for a resolution approving the instrument to be tabled.

I do not think it is a very good procedure. If the Minister says, "It has been done before," frankly, I think that, with this Government, we should have a very close look at procedures, because there is the question, raised by a former Tory Lord Chancellor, of an elective dictatorship.

I am opposed to any Government receiving unqualified powers which place them outside the scrutiny of this place. The Minister has a duty to explain why it is necessary simply to have unqualified directions. He might argue, "Of course, this is to require money to be repaid, and surely the House should ensure that, to obtain money for the Treasury, whether in sterling or any obscure currencies such as European currency units"——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is not Euro-currency that is the problem, but money that comes from the Sultan of Brunei. If he wants to become involved he will want to use other foreign money and at the same time he will want to hide it. He will not want that fact disclosed by the people to whom he loans the money, who will act as purchasers, as in the case of Harrods. He will not want anybody to know that he is behind the deal.

Mr. Cryer: That is another aspect of the need for transparency, particularly in financial arrangements. If the resolution is passed, the Secretary of State will presumably have the power to give directions. Will they be by way of letter or published document? Will they have to be published in any paper anywhere at any time? Can they be questioned or refuted? For example, could the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board say that a direction was faulty because the amount of money contained in it was wrong? Does the Secretary of State have the right to demand a sum of money even though there is a dispute about the amount involved?

As the Minister knows, from time to time Departments get statutory instruments wrong. Sometimes they contain ambiguities or faults. Sometimes a Minister goes beyond his or her powers and a statutory instrument will come before the Scrutiny Committee to be corrected. But, as I understand it, there is no scrutiny of the directions that we are debating. I know that it will come as a shock to many hon. Members, but civil servants can make errors and Ministers can compound those by signing a bit of paper as it is pushed in front of them along with many other bits of paper, and then there is no possibility of challenge.

The Minister may say that any dispute could go to court, but that is a counsel of despair. Our legislation should be as clear as possible before it leaves this place. We should try by our best endeavours to exclude the possibility of resorting to the courts in order to rectify a mistake.

Through a statutory instrument a Minister has power to require repayment, setting out the terms and conditions of that repayment. It is open to scrutiny by the House and by the public bodies referred to in the resolution. That would be a better and more satisfactory procedure.

If the Minister says that we have always dealt with such matters in this way I can only reiterate what I said about an elective dictatorship. The fact that something has always been done in a particular way in this place is no substantial argument for saying that it should always be done in that way in the future. There are many virtues in many of our procedures, but there are also many defects, and this is one of them. Any opportunity to improve our methods should be taken.

This is a radical Government. This is the Government who undertake new procedures. *[Interruption.]* I am being ironic.

Mr. Skinner: That will not be clear in *Hansard.*

Mr. Cryer: That is the sort of claim that the Government make. My guess is that the Minister will use the old, traditional arguments to justify this legislation.

[Mr. Cryer]

The Government often claim—falsely—to adopt new methods and to take new initiatives. This measure is not good enough. We should have some accountability. That is one of the Government's Achille's heels. They do not like accountability. That is why they are not publishing the report from the Department of Trade and Industry on the takeover of Harrods. That is why they are keeping it covered up. I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, share my concern that there should be transparency and accountability to the House, and I hope that the Minister will respond in that spirit.

11.29 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): In view of the three interventions I had better explain to the House exactly what the resolution does and particularly how, in answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), England and Wales are to be distinguished from Scotland.

When the new electricity companies move into the private sector it will no longer be appropriate—as the House will agree—for them to borrow for long-term purposes from the national loans fund or to enjoy interest rate benefits associated with Treasury guarantees and exchange cover on foreign currency borrowing. However, the Electricity Bill provides in clause 72 for lending from the national loans fund between vesting and flotation, and this is intended for short-term purposes.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am glad that the Minister made that clear.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman says that he is glad I made that point clear. That is what my remarks are all about, and I hope to clarify other points as I go along.

Once in the private sector, the new companies will secure the debt finance they need from the sources that are open to the private sector generally—banks, institutions, and the money and capital markets, for example. The capital structures with which they will be established will take account of their future borrowing needs.

We believe that it is sensible that during the period when the new companies have been vested as plcs but are still publicly owned, they should start to deal with their financial requirements as much as possible as though they were already in the private sector—and despite the fact that they will still be able to borrow for short-term purposes from the national loans fund.

That means for the industry in England and Wales that present long-term debt provided from Government sources or with Government guarantee and exchange cover must be repaid by the transfer date. In the case of England and Wales, the present long-term loans are due to be repaid in instalments. By the end of December 1989 the Electricity Council's outstanding debt to the national loans fund will be £1,185 million, and its outstanding debt to foreign lenders £194 million. The new clause to which the resolution relates ensures that that outstanding debt will be prepaid by the transfer date.

In answer to the hon. Member for Cathcart, the position in respect of Scotland is substantially different. The Scottish boards' level of outstanding debt, both to the national loans fund and to foreign lenders, reflects the successive investments made in new operating plant, most recently at Torness. The restructuring of that debt will occur primarily after vesting day, as allowed for in clause 74 of the Bill—when sums owing to the national loans fund will be replaced by a combination of debentures, issued share capital and reserves. To make that process easier, the bulk of the outstanding debt to foreign lenders will be replaced, prior to vesting, by NLF debt.

Mr. Maxton: The Minister should make it clear to the House that clause 74 also gives the Government the power to write off a large amount of that debt, if they so wish.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman has twice made that point to the House tonight. The companies' capital structure will of course be a matter for final consideration—and that applies to England and Wales as much as to Scotland. The companies' capital structures, debt to equity ratios and so on, will be addressed when the companies are formed. I have given the hon. Gentleman the answer for which he asked and I hope that the House feels able to accept the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 140, Noes 40.

Division No. 139] **[11.33 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Ground, Patrick
Amess, David	Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Amos, Alan	Hague, William
Arbuthnot, James	Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Ashby, David	Harris, David
Atkinson, David	Hayes, Jerry
Baldry, Tony	Hind, Kenneth
Batiste, Spencer	Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Bevan, David Gilroy	Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter	Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Hunter, Andrew
Boswell, Tim	Irvine, Michael
Bottomley, Peter	Jack, Michael
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Jackson, Robert
Brazier, Julian	Janman, Tim
Bright, Graham	Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Buck, Sir Antony	King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*	Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Lang, Ian
Carrington, Matthew	Latham, Michael
Carttiss, Michael	Lawrence, Ivan
Chapman, Sydney	Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*	Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*	Lightbown, David
Currie, Mrs Edwina	Lilley, Peter
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*	Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Day, Stephen	Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Dorrell, Stephen	Maclean, David
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James	McLoughlin, Patrick
Dunn, Bob	Mans, Keith
Durant, Tony	Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Evennett, David	Maude, Hon Francis
Favell, Tony	Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Fishburn, John Dudley	Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Forman, Nigel	Miller, Sir Hal
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*	Mills, Iain
Forth, Eric	Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Freeman, Roger	Mitchell, Sir David
French, Douglas	Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Gale, Roger	Moss, Malcolm
Garel-Jones, Tristan	Moynihan, Hon Colin
Gill, Christopher	Nelson, Anthony
Goodhart, Sir Philip	Neubert, Michael
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles	Nicholls, Patrick
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*	Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Gregory, Conal	Norris, Steve
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*	Paice, James

Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and Mr. Michael Fallon.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAllion, John
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Nellist, Dave
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Salmond, Alex
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Electricity Bill, it is expedient to authorise the giving of directions requiring the Electricity Council, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board or the South of Scotland Electricity Board—

(a) to make payments to the Secretary of State in respect of advances made by him to the Council or Board;

(b) to make payments to the Treasury in respect of loans to the Council or Board made wholly or mainly in currencies other than sterling.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Electricity Bill, it is expedient to authorise the giving of directions requiring the Electricity Council, the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board or the South of Scotland Electricity Board—

(a) to make payments to the Secretary of State in respect of advances made by him to the Council or Board;

(b) to make payments to the Treasury in respect of loans to the Council or Board made wholly or mainly in currencies other than sterling.

LAW OF PROPERTY (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time tomorrow.

Friendly Societies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

11.46 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I am pleased to have this opportunity of raising the important subject of the role of friendly societies in encouraging savings, for which they have a long and respected tradition in this country, dating back over 400 years to the incorporation of the Carters in Leith in 1555. In 1973 they were defined as

"a society of good fellowship for the purpose of raising from time to time, by voluntary contributions, a stock or fund for mutual relief and maintenance of all and every member thereof, in old age, sickness and infirmity, and for the relief of widows and children of deceased members."

In encouraging thrift and responsibility and in promoting an active concern for others, particularly among the lower income groups in society, that description of 1793 adequately fits the active citizens of today whom the Government rightly wish to encourage.

Although the friendly societies have a valuable and increasing role to play in a social and financial context today, they face three major difficulties. First, the market for financial services is becoming more concentrated and larger scale. The localised and heterogeneous nature of the societies—whether they be dividing, deposit or Holloway societies—puts them at a disadvantage.

Secondly, the anachronistic legal status of friendly societies and the legal structure within which they operate, which basically dates back to Victorian legislation and, particularly before that, to 1793, has restricted the scope of their activities and their ability to respond to financial trends in the money markets.

Thirdly, the taxation and regulatory regime in which they work, and which they recognise to be necessary in most respects, is not sensitive to their character and the services that they provide. That is particularly the case in their developing a role which is complementary to the welfare state and not swamped by it.

The history of friendly societies gives an insight into the problems that they experience and into their potential. Before 1911, they were basically self-help organisations which mitigated the excesses of the workhouse and the Poor Law of 1834. By 1911, they had 6·6 million members. The great expansion took place after 1911 when, under the National Insurance Act, friendly societies were given approved society status, which meant that they retained their mutual insurance and contributory schemes and used those as a springboard for their own activities, as they took compulsory payments from taxpayers and made distributions to the sick. By 1945, they had 8·7 million members.

After 1945, despite the fact that Lord Beveridge wanted his reforms to leave room for voluntary action and a system that did not stifle opportunity, incentive or responsibility, as the system evolved, benefits were 30 per cent. above the levels recommended by Beveridge.

Their size and scope expanded rapidly, to the extent that, between 1950 and 1987, they increased by more than five and a half times social security benefits—from 4·7 per cent. to 11 per cent. of gross domestic product.

There was no direct role, as there had been prior to 1945, for friendly societies in administering the schemes, and inevitably, because of the size of the schemes, contributory insurance became that in name only, and the scheme was financed primarily by the general taxpayer. The effect of these changes was to erode the friendly societies' traditional market, and, more important, to erode the ethos of saving and of mutual help and mutual responsibility, which has sustained the societies for literally hundreds of years. Now, there are only 462 societies with 7 million members, and their numbers are declining.

It is ironic that over the last few years the greater provision and the good intentions of the welfare state have, in fact, increased the division between those who are financially sophisticated, who have higher incomes and are natural savers, and those who have low incomes, who are dependent upon the state, who, very often, are caught in the poverty trap and therefore have no particular incentive to save. Although there have been recent attempts, via social security legislation, to counteract such trends, I believe that the friendly societies have a principal role in bridging that social and economic gap.

The trends bolstering societies have been boosted by three further factors. First, there are the demographic changes that will take place over the next few years. I am thinking, in particular, of the increase in the elderly population from 9 million now to 10 million by the year 2000. Indeed, the number of very elderly people is likely to increase by 50 per cent., to 1·5 million, by the year 2000. Those changes will supplement the need for an addition to state retirement incomes via pensions and, indeed, the kind of annuities that have been provided by friendly societies.

Secondly, I believe that more people will want to arrange their affairs on a more localised, community basis and will react against the economies of scale that we have seen in the last few years. Thirdly, we have a desire to increase savings for economic reasons, given the fact that the savings ratio now is only 1·7 per cent. of disposable income—back to the 1949 levels—against 11 per cent. in 1985. Of course, it would be unrealistic to expect that all friendly societies will necessarily attempt to meet all these needs. Indeed, there has been an element of concentration already. The chief registrar, in his latest report, which came out about a month ago, said that 90 per cent. of total funds going into the friendly society movement is generated by 37 societies. The five largest are collecting societies that lack many characteristics of friendly societies in the strict sense but, nevertheless, support the arguments that the friendly societies liaison committee put forward.

On the other hand, one third of friendly societies are not actually taking any new business, and I believe that there will be an inevitable division between those that do a lot of taxable business in the mass market—I am thinking, for instance, of collecting societies, which collected some £190 million in contributions in 1987—and those smaller, more socially orientated, more traditional friendly societies, which concentrate on more philanthropic and local activities.

Nevertheless, in order to facilitate the adoption of these new roles, and given the speed and competitive pressure of financial markets at present, there are two areas of reform that need to be addressed urgently. The first is the need to widen the scope of the potential activities of friendly societies. The present scope, under schedule 1 to the Friendly Societies Act 1974, is outdated and, indeed, in many respects nonsensical. For instance, friendly societies can provide life policies for married couples, but not for couples who are living together; they can insure tools of the trade against fire, for the princely sum of £15, but not

against any other kind of loss; and they are prevented from writing any non-life assurance business, whether on an agency basis or direct.

Subject to the necessary regulations, I believe that the friendly societies ought to be allowed to manage, not merely to invest in their own unit trusts through subsidiaries and without sacrificing their mutual status. They ought to be able to set up their own personal equity plans. That would increase share ownership among the lower income sectors of society. They ought to be able to write their own reinsurance, especially on the risks of other societies. They ought to be able to engage in non-life assurance, at least on an agency basis, and they ought to be able to make loans to their members that are slightly greater than the present totally outdated level of £200. Finally, they ought to be treated consistently, by the Inland Revenue, in particular, as between the powers of those societies that are sui generis, rather than be discriminated against on the basis of when they were set up.

It is a sad fact that, while these powers are not available to friendly societies, some—like the Family Assurance Society—have already opted to go, with the consent of 75 per cent. of their members, for plc status or for mutual life office status, which will mean leaving the friendly societies movement and many of the advantages that that gives.

By widening the scope of services, they ought to be able to provide, through the friendly society movement, effective competition to other financial institutions and more effective and efficient services for their members. They ought to be able to increase their access to markets which at present are dominated by insurance companies and pension funds, particularly by those which corner the market by means of tied intermediaries. They get one and three quarter times the recommended commission rates and the disclosure rules for commission are not so rigorous for independent financial intermediaries, upon whom friendly societies have to rely.

Equally, however, it is unrealistic to think that every friendly society will wish to engage in this kind of activity. It is estimated that only the 40 largest will do so. Others will try to fulfil the more local social and philanthropic aims that are traditional in friendly societies. However, in order to do so—and this applies especially to those friendly societies that do not benefit from economies of scale because of their small size—it has been estimated that the financial burden of complying with the Financial Services Act will mean a 30 per cent. increase in annual costs. They have been deprived of a volunteer sales force because of the expertise now required by the Financial Services Act of those who sell financial products. Tax exemption of their products, particularly life assurance, has been crucial and, I believe, will become even more crucial for the small friendly societies, and for their big brothers, too.

It is a sad fact that, since 1987, for all societies, whether they do taxable business or not, the tax-exempt limit has been set at £9 per month per premium, which is just over £100 a year, and £750 for sums assured. That represents only four weeks' average wages now. Just before the war those same tax-exempt figures represented two years' average wages. Therefore the case for a substantial increase in the tax-exempt limits for friendly societies is very strong.

To increase tax-exempt limits is consistent with the tax relief available for occupational pension schemes or with the tax exemption that is available, up to certain limits, on certain national savings deposits or on the tax-free benefits available from investments in gilts, in certain circumstances. That contrasts strongly with the increase in this year's Finance Bill from £2,400 to £4,800 in the annual payments to personal equity plans, the proceeds of which can be tax-exempt and which, ironically, so many societies want to be able to market themselves.

It could be argued that organisations with quaint names such as the Nottingham Oddfellows, the Sons of Scotland Temperance or even the Hearts of Oak, and with the even quainter values of self-responsibility, thrift and mutual help, founded on their mainly Victorian origins, should either join the ranks of, or be absorbed by, the legions of financial supermarkets. That would be a mistake. Time will prove that, as organisations for the lower income groups, supplementing the provisions of the social security system and improving the incentives and opportunities for lower income groups within the welfare state, to save, and as organisations that cope sensitively with demographic changes in a local way, the friendly societies have an enormous contribution to make.

Given the constraints on legislative time, the societies do not expect an immediate commitment by the Minister to a new friendly societies Act—they appreciate how complicated and wide-ranging that would be. But they would like a commitment by the Government to the principle of a healthy friendly society movement. They would like to hear of the imminent arrival of a package of measures, including fiscal changes, that would help them fulfil their role of encouraging saving in Britain today.

12.2 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on his success in securing this Adjournment debate and on his characteristic lucidity in explaining the role of the friendly societies and putting his case tonight. I found his analysis of the historic antecedents of the societies fascinating, as was his examination of the problems that they now face.

Friendly societies are an important part of our social and economic fabric. They have supporters in all parts of the House—sadly, those among the Opposition have not turned up—and enemies, as far as I know, in none. For that reason they are rarely the subject of debate in the House, and I welcome the opportunity which my hon. Friend has provided us with tonight to discuss and consider them further.

Friendly societies have a distinguished history of encouraging thrift and mutual self-help. That has changed as the years have gone by, and as my hon. Friend has said, their role has become more difficult in some ways and they have had to adapt to changing circumstances. There are signs that they are doing so. The Government have sought, without going as far as major new primary legislation, to help the societies to adjust to these conditions in a number of ways.

For example, we have implemented the European Commission life directive, and brought the solvency basis of the largest societies into line with that of the insurance companies, and removed restrictions on investments for authorised societies. I recognise that my hon Friend feels that the Financial Services Act 1986 placed considerable burdens on many societies, but it did enable the

[Mr. Peter Lilley]

establishment of an investor protection scheme, of which the societies with assets and members representing over 90 per cent. of those who benefit from the friendly society movement have taken advantage.

Finally, the Financial Services Act provided relief for small societies under the transitional provisions of schedule 15 to the Act, treating them as exempt if they decide to do no new regulated investment business or are already doing no new business.

The friendly societies' liaison committee published a memorandum last year which it sent me and with which my hon. Friend will be familiar. I met the committee in September to discuss it. It set out its case for a new friendly societies Act which would grant extended powers to those societies capable of exercising them. Like my hon. Friend, it requested a new tax regime that recognised the special status of friendly societies.

At my meeting with the liaison committee, I agreed to undertake a comprehensive study of the legislative framework of friendly societies. This is, as my hon. Friend recognised, a long and complex task, and it is still under way. Only when it is complete will the Government be able to decide whether and what new legislation is warranted and, more important, the priority it should be given in relation to other claims on parliamentary time.

It may assist the House in understanding the time taken to consider the friendly societies' proposals if I set out some details of the problems faced in preparing the report I commissioned.

First, the nature of friendly societies is such as to make the situation far from straightforward and simple. As my hon. Friend recognised, there is a restriction on the powers of societies in schedule 1 of the 1974 Act, which is essentially a consolidation of the legislation laid down in the 19th century. It is undoubtedly possible to amend and extend that in some ways analogous to those suggested by my hon. Friend. If one were to go further and try to give the societies powers to set up subsidiaries to undertake a number of activities that he and the liaison committee suggested the friendly societies ought to be allowed to undertake, that would mean a fundamental restructuring of the nature of friendly societies. At present they are not corporate bodies, and consequently they cannot possess subsidiaries. It would need a very fundamental change in the legislative nature of friendly societies to enable them to become corporate bodies and possess subsidiaries. That would be quite a daunting and difficult task, to say the least.

Of course, societies have the possibility at present to convert themselves into mutual insurance societies. My hon. Friend mentioned that one society was considering doing that, and a number of societies have done so in the past.

I am also looking into the supervision and regulation of friendly societies. The Government have in recent years revised the regulatory regime for banks, building societies and those conducting investment business. Investors expect and should receive reasonable protection for their savings. There is now a voluntary investor protection scheme in place and societies have in general responded well to becoming members. However, the regulatory regime for friendly societies has lagged behind that of other financial institutions.

The friendly societies movement has long provided encouragement to the small saver and those who are relatively poor. Although the amounts invested in friendly societies tend to be lower than many other forms of saving they nevertheless represent significant amounts for the individual. When I met the friendly societies liaison committee I told it that any extension of societies' powers would go hand in hand with an improved regulatory regime. I am sure it will accept this.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the tax position of friendly societies, as did the liaison committee. There is a distinction between the traditional social and philanthropic role of societies and their more commercial investment business. It is right that the latter should be taxed in broadly the same way as life offices. The current tax rules are therefore designed to favour the more traditional societies, writing longer-term policies for funeral expenses or retirement, as against more commercial societies selling 10-year endowment policies for pure investment purposes. The change in 1987—rather than 1984, as I think my hon. Friend said—from a limit on sum assured to premiums, setting that limit at £100, helped to secure that objective. The limit is kept under review but I see no need for an increase at present.

One measure that friendly societies have suggested in particular is that they should be able to issue tax-exempt policies up to an annual subscription equal to that for unit trusts within personal equity plans, and my hon. Friend endorsed that proposal. Since the improvements to PEPs in this year's Budget, that would entail raising the present £100 limit to £2,400 a year. As my right hon. Friend said, the essential purpose of the tax arrangements for personal equity plans and the changes he made in the Budget is to encourage and widen share ownership and strengthen popular capitalism. Therefore, there is no case for an increase in the £100 annual limit on tax-exempt life assurance policies because that would not be geared to achieving that widening of direct share ownership. In practice, it is likely to do little more than divert business from other forms of savings—including diverting it from PEPs and taxable life insurance.

A related issue is whether registered friendly societies should themselves be allowed to act as plan managers. I shall certainly bear this suggestion in mind when I look into the broader issues concerning the regulation and supervision of societies. As to whether any of the other tax provisions should be changed—for example, the rule that limits the extent to which friendly societies can issue new tax-exempt policies—the time to consider such issues will be when the regulation and supervision of societies have been settled. At that stage, the representations that my hon. Friend has made will, of course, weigh with me.

While I am on the subject of tax, I should mention that one type of policy which some friendly societies issue will benefit from the new tax relief for retired people announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget. I am sure that friendly societies that offer such policies will welcome this relief and will market their policies more vigorously to those who can benefit.

The Budget also introduced changes in the taxation of life companies. Friendly societies which issue policies that are not tax-exempt may be concerned about the effect of the reforms of tax rules for life assurance proposed in the Budget. It is clearly appropriate that societies which carry on business of this nature should receive tax treatment

comparable with the mutual life assurance companies so that they will continue to compete for business on a broadly equivalent basis.

A policyholder with a typical society will benefit from the reduced rate for policyholders' income and gains as suggested by the liaison committee in its response to the Inland Revenue's consultative document on life assurance taxation. New policyholders will benefit from the abolition of life assurance policy duty. Such policyholders will be unlikely to be affected by the proposal to ring-fence pension business expenses, or by the measures that change the calculation of pension profits. The revised treatment for expenses of acquiring new life assurance business will lead to some acceleration of the payments against tax, but taken together with the reduction in tax rate, the effect is expected to be broadly neutral.

I know that there is much sympathy for the friendly society movement and a desire to see it continue to prosper and perform its essential role in encouraging savings and mutual self-help. My hon. Friend expressed those matters most eloquently. Many hon. Members would back my hon. Friend's call for speeding up the fostering of friendly societies but we must not try to do that more rapidly than may be possible. Rightly, my hon. Friend did not dwell on legislation, and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not have permitted that in an Adjournment debate. I think that I have demonstrated that I am considering whether there is scope and need for legislation, and during the current review I shall certainly bear in mind my hon. Friend's interesting comments.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fourteen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 5 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Caithness and Sutherland (Economy)

1. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has received the commissioned reports on the economy of Caithness and Sutherland; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): I have received the report by PIEDA—Planning, Industrial and Economic Development Advisers—on prospects for the Caithness economy. The report will be published by the Highlands and Islands Development Board next week.

Mr. Maclennan: As the severe economic disruption faced by Caithness and Sutherland is the direct result of the Government's decision last July, in which the Secretary of State for Scotland participated directly, does the Minister accept that the Scottish Office has a particular responsibility to identify and promote suitable Government office relocation in Caithness, which has shown itself to be suitable through the Atomic Energy Authority superannuation office? When does the Minister hope to announce special investment measures to offset the economic losses that have resulted from the Government's decision? Will he also recognise that that is needed to help the infrastructure and local efforts—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the Minister answers, may I ask for brief questions as we are making very slow progress?

Mr. Lang: The Government certainly accept our responsibility to help the economy of the area to flourish. The closure of the fast reactor has been delayed until 1994 and that will enable measures to be taken. The hon. Gentleman will know that the HIDB, with a very substantial budget of more than £45 million, has set up a local project team and the Caithness steering group is looking at the area to see what can be done to assist the economy to recover and to flourish generally, as it is doing.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Minister accept that the Nirex proposals for a nuclear waste deep depository will provide no answer to the economic problems which might result from the phasing out of Dounreay? Will he note that the Labour party and the vast majority of Scots are implacably opposed to such a development by Nirex in Caithness?

Mr. Lang: I note the hon. Gentleman's and the Labour party's position. Nirex has proposed the Dounreay site as a possible area for geological investigation partly because there is a measure of local support in that area. If it were to go ahead, a number of jobs would certainly be created locally. However, the matter will proceed through the normal planning application procedure, as one would expect.

Mr. Salmond: The Nirex proposal for nuclear dumping is fiercely resisted throughout Scotland. If it is dependent on the measure of local support, will the Minister of State give a commitment that the Government will abide by the results of a local referendum on the proposal?

Mr. Lang: I can give the hon. Gentleman no such assurance. There are well tried and tested planning procedures which I am sure will be appropriate.

Council Properties

2. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the sale of council properties and any further measures he proposes to introduce to encourage tenants to buy their council properties.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): Since April 1979 nearly 150,000 public sector houses in Scotland have been sold to sitting tenants. The Government keep under review the possibility of improving the opportunities for tenants to own their own homes.

Mr. Bennett: I welcome the increase in the number of owner-occupied houses in Scotland, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the fact that only 44 per cent. of the population of Scotland own their own homes means that fewer people in Scotland have real financial independence? Will he do all that he can to increase the level to that in England and Wales?

Mr. Rifkind: The proportion in Scotland has increased from 31 per cent. to about 44 per cent. I am pleased to say that the level of interest in acquiring public sector homes is higher than ever, so Scotland is likely to approach a level comparable with the rest of the United Kingdom and other parts of western Europe in the not too distant future.

Mr. Lambie: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman really wishes to encourage tenants to purchase council property, why does he not take the advice of the Adam Smith Institute and increase the percentage rebate from 70 per cent. to 100 per cent?

Mr. Rifkind: I am as fascinated as I am sure the Adam Smith Institute will be to welcome the hon. Gentleman as a recruit to its cause. I sometimes find myself unable to be as enthusiastic as the hon. Gentleman clearly is about giving tenants extra rights to purchase their homes, which makes me slightly embarrassed about my position. In all seriousness, a concept of 100 per cent. rebates, which in practice means giving the houses away, has certain fundamental objections. Home ownership should be not only a right but a responsibility. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] It has never been part of the Government's objective to impose home ownership upon those who could not afford to maintain their homes. The fact that many tenants make

no contribution to their rent due to housing benefit should be taken into account. If the hon. Gentleman is arguing otherwise, I may have to think again.

Mr. Ernie Ross: What concern does the Secretary of State feel about the spate of panic buying that has broken out as a result of the changes in the forms of tenancy for council tenants—the "pick a landlord" scheme? Is he not concerned that many council house tenants are taking on a burden that they will be unable to bear in future, particularly with the massive increase in mortgage interest rates for which his Government are responsible?

Mr. Rifkind: By its irresponsible scaremongering, the Labour party has been partly responsible for the tremendous boost in applications to buy public sector houses.

Mr. Marlow: Would there not be some advantage in these matters being decided totally in Scotland in accordance with an amended version of the Scotland Bill proposed by Opposition Members—the amendment being that if Scotland were to decide its own housing policy, we would need no Scottish Members in this House to decide housing policy in England?

Mr. Rifkind: That is as may be, though some of us might not agree with my hon. Friend. This is proving to be a fascinating day. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) is apparently in favour of Scotland's independence while the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) seems to be in favour of council house sales.

Geriatric Unit (Rutherglen)

3. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the building of the geriatric unit at Rutherglen will start; and how long it is expected to take.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): This project has been held in abeyance by Greater Glasgow health board pending the outcome of its current strategy review of services for the elderly. I understand that the review is due to be completed within two months. Thereafter it will be considered by the board's policy and planning committee before a consultative document is issued.

Mr. McAvoy: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will recall that some time ago he gave me an assurance that the health board had said that it expected the review to be completed by spring this year. The Minister has now announced that the health board intends to delay for a further two months. Will he ensure that the health board completes the review and starts the process of building the unit in Rutherglen? The Minister understands the circumstances and appreciates the fact that all those living in Cambuslang and half of Rutherglen within my constituency have to go to Lanarkshire health board for geriatric services. That is intolerable and there should be no delay in attacking such circumstances.

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the position in his constituency is unacceptable. He has a reasonable basis for complaint about the delays experienced and I am happy to give the undertaking that he seeks.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister agree that an extra reason for pressing ahead with the geriatric unit in Rutherglen is to reduce the unplanned growth of nursing homes in Ayrshire? Is he aware that that is resulting in the migration of elderly people to those nursing homes and is contrary to all the best policy put forward by the Health Service, Age Concern and other organisations which believe that old people should be cared for in institutions, sheltered housing and other such facilities near their own homes? The unplanned growth of nursing homes in Ayrshire means that many buildings which were previously hotels are being—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] There seems to be some barracking. I am having trouble with my own side.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will try not to have any trouble with me and will be brief, please.

Mr. Foulkes: I will do my best, Mr. Speaker. Many of the buildings were previously hotels. That is undermining the position of the tourist industry in Ayrshire and we are ending up——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had a jolly good go.

Mr. Foulkes: We are ending up with a Costa Geriatrica which is wholly unwanted in our county.

Mr. Forsyth: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's prejudice against private nursing homes. They are able to attract people to Ayrshire because that is where people want to go. Conservative Members believe that facilities should reflect the priorities of patients, not of planners. In reply to the hon. Gentleman's recommendation about matters in Rutherglen, I must say that if the private sector is able to play a role in meeting needs there, I would be the first to welcome that.

Channel Tunnel (Job Prospects)

4. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Scottish Development Agency to discuss job prospects for Scotland arising from the Channel tunnel project.

Mr. Rifkind: I will be meeting the agency board on 22 May to discuss a range of issues of mutual interest. If the agency wishes to discuss job prospects arising from the Channel tunnel at this meeting, or otherwise, I shall be glad to do so.

Mr. Clarke: Does the Secretary of State agree that if Scots are to experience a fair share of the jobs which may be available from 1992 and the Channel tunnel, investment in rail and road is absolutely essential? In particular, does he agree with the Freightliner working party about the enormous potential of the Coatbridge-Gartcosh location for the superfreight terminal, provided that there is adequate infrastructure—including a new junction from the M73 motorway—to make the project a success?

Mr. Rifkind: I am interested by what the hon. Gentleman says. British Rail is already considering sites, including Gartcosh, as part of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 section 40 consultations and its plans will be published towards the end of this year. On roads, the Government are committed to improving the A74 to

motorway standard. That will make a crucial difference because it will integrate Scotland's motorway network with that of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be in his own interests to respond positively to the question that has just been addressed to him and that if he did it might increase the number of Scottish Back Bench Tory Members present from one?

Mr. Rifkind: I am not certain of the relevance of the hon. Gentleman's question. Scottish Conservative Members have a considerably better voting record in the House than the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friends.

Mr. Stern: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there will be no job prospects in Scotland from the Channel tunnel so long as the railway unions are unable to control their old-fashioned Socialist members, as was the case on the London Underground this morning?

Mr. Rifkind: The encouraging sign for job prospects is that Scottish companies have already been extremely successful. More than 20 Scottish companies have been successful in winning contracts for the Channel tunnel, which represents orders of £65 million and 14 per cent. of all orders so far. Clearly, Scottish companies have been doing well in winning such a high proportion of overall orders in open competition.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Secretary of State recognise that there will be considerable disappointment at the blandness of his replies to the pertinent questions asked by my hon. Friends? Can he give any indication of Scottish Office involvement in planning for the Channel tunnel, including the crucial questions about the routes to be followed by rail links in the south? Is it not time that the Scottish Office broke its slumber on this and showed some recognition of the potentially enormous adverse consequences if there are not fast, direct links between the tunnel and Scotland?

Mr. Rifkind: For once, the hon. Gentleman seems to have written his supplementary questions before hearing the exchanges. He referred to the way in which I responded to questions from his hon. Friends, but there has been only one such question and I responded positively to it. We attach great importance to the link with the Channel tunnel being suitable for the requirements of Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friends and I have had several meetings with the chairman and other officials of British Rail and we are in close contact not only with British Rail but with the Department of Transport. I entirely endorse the view that it is crucial that the opportunities offered by the Channel tunnel should be available not just in the south of England, but to the rest of England, Scotland, Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole.

Council House Sales

5. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland since May 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since April 1979 nearly 150,000 public sector houses in Scotland have been sold to sitting tenants. Included in that figure are more than 102,000 sales by local authorities.

Mr. Knox: What percentage of the council housing stock in Scotland has been sold to sitting tenants and if that figure is still significantly below that for England, what steps is my hon. Friend taking to increase the number of council houses in Scotland that are sold to tenants?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Approximately 14·7 per cent. of the public sector housing stock has been sold since 1979. In England the figure is 19·5 per cent., but the figures for Scotland are escalating rapidly. In the third quarter of 1988 such sales were running at about 4,150 per month, which is 43 per cent. higher than the figures for the corresponding quarter of 1987. My hon. Friend will be encouraged to hear that the demand is constantly growing.

Mr. Ingram: If a private landlord takes over public sector housing stock and resells it to another private landlord, will sitting tenants retain the right to buy?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It depends whether the hon. Gentleman is asking about tenants' choice or voluntary disposal. With voluntary disposals, a sitting tenant has the right to buy.

Mrs. Ray Michie: For those tenants who do not choose to buy their own house, will Scottish Homes guarantee their rights if they choose a new landlord and that landlord does not carry out his managerial responsibilities?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Homes will certainly have a monitoring role which I expect it to take seriously.

Dr. Reid: Instead of striding to the Dispatch Box to boast about the number of council houses that he has sold off, would not the Minister do better to give us an abject apology for his shameful record on building them in the first place? Why does the Minister think that we have 30,000 homeless families in Scotland? Why are 192,000 families on waiting lists, on which they wait for an average of three years? Why have 40,000 families waited more than four or five years for a council house? Is it not because the Government's record shows a drop in council house building from 18,500 council houses in 1979 to 8,500 council house start-ups now? Is that not a shameful record for any Government?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman anticipates the next question. His first comments were based on a fundamental misconception. I have not sold any council houses. All that the Government did was to provide a right to tenants under the Tenants' Rights, Etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 which included security of tenure. To their eternal shame, the Labour Opposition opposed that measure.

Homelessness

6. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures for homelessness in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Returns submitted by local authorities indicate that 9,000 households which applied under the homelessness legislation in 1987-88 were assessed by local authorities as being homeless. In 1986-87, the figure was 10,500.

Mr. Griffiths: Why has the Secretary of State washed his hands of homelessness, which has reached horrific

levels in Edinburgh and Scotland? If he does not do something about the problem soon, Edinburgh will get a reputation to match the worst of downtown New York.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for having given me notice of his supplementary question in the Edinburgh *Evening News* today which states:

"a row blew up during Scottish Questions in the Commons".

I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I must advise him that the statutory responsibility for the homeless rests with local authorities. They are under a duty to ensure that accommodation is made available for those in priority need. The code of guidance issued by the Government makes it clear that where possible local authorities should secure accommodation for homeless young people at risk of exploitation. I am sure that the city from which we both come is doing that job and is taking its responsibilities seriously.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Is the Minister aware of the reply that I received from his hon. Friend the Minister of State about the number of council houses sold in the new towns and about the impact that that is having on homelessness in the five new towns? Will the Minister undertake, with the Minister of State, to initiate an inquiry into the fact that public sector building in the new towns is inadequate to meet the needs of the homeless persons there?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Research has shown that when houses are sold to tenants the vast majority of tenants continue to live in them as owners, so it does not have a marked effect on the problems of waiting lists or homelessness. We are conducting research into homelessness and waiting lists which, though related, are separate subjects. We hope that the results of research into homelessness will be ready towards the end of this year, and that those in respect of waiting lists will be ready early next year.

Mr. Maxton: Among all the self-congratulation in which the Minister and his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State have been indulging today, perhaps he will take some time to answer the question that was put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) and explain why homelessness in Scotland as a whole has risen by 77 per cent., in Aberdeen district council area by 200 per cent., and in Renfrew by 355 per cent. since 1983. Council house starts last June were only 11 per cent. of what they were in 1979 and mortgage repossessions in Scotland have risen by a staggering 686 per cent. since 1980. How does the Minister justify that in terms of the Government's housing policy in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If the hon. Gentleman wants to know the reasons for homelessness, there are a vast variety of them, including marital break-up, the incidence of single-parent families, and the many young people who leave home at an early stage. We have greatly increased resources to local authorities in Scotland this year. Their housing revenue account is no less than £474 million gross, which is £29 million more than it was last year, and 6·5 per cent. up on last year's figures. That will undoubtedly be of assistance to local authorities.

National Health Service

7. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from general practitioners in Scotland about the Government's plans to restructure the National Health Service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following the publication of the Government's White Papers, "Promoting Better Health" and "Working For Patients—Caring for the 1990s", I wrote to all general medical practitioners in Scotland on 16 March asking for their views on a new contract. Those views are currently being received and studied.

Mr. Marshall: Is the Minister aware of the great health problems in the east end of Glasgow, with its high numbers of sick, poor, unemployed and elderly people? GPs there have worked hard for years to reduce the size of their lists. Why is the Minister forcing GPs back into the bad old days? Why is he forcing GPs to provide the cheapest treatment rather than the best treatment for patients? Can he guarantee that that will not happen and that he will alter his proposals accordingly?

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the guarantee that he seeks. It is certainly no part of our policy or of our proposals that the standards of primary care and service offered by general practitioners should in any way be reduced. There is much in our proposals to which doctors in inner-city areas, particularly deprived areas, should look forward with optimism. Doctors who continue to have the same list size but offer additional services concerned with preventive medicine, day surgery, and so on, will be able to maintain and enhance their incomes.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: No doubt the Minister would find it embarrassing to give even an initial assessment of the negative responses that he has received. Members of Parliament are receiving copies of letters that were sent by GPs. I have not received one letter from GPs in my area showing broad support for the Government's proposals. Does the Minister accept that the general thrust of the GPs' responses shows that they predict a reversal of 40 years of service by the emphasis on capitation lists? It will be particularly difficult for women doctors, who are often employed on a part-time basis and have an important role to play in preventive medicine. Will the Minister give a commitment that he will not follow the Secretary of State for Health's example but will try to take the medical profession with him on any changes that are implemented?

Mr. Forsyth: With regard to the proposals to make the Health Service more responsive to the needs of the patients, the provisions in Scotland will be exactly the same as elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We have already given an undertaking that the contract for general practitioners will reflect the particular circumstances in Scotland. It is slightly surprising to find a Scottish nationalist Member arguing that the contract proposed for England will apply in Scotland. We hope to make an announcement shortly on our proposals for general practitioners in Scotland.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Secretary of State agree that to date at least 191 medical practitioners in Ayrshire alone have written to him indicating their complete opposition to the plans in the White Paper "Working for Patients"? They state categorically that, instead of working for

patients, it will work against patients and that it is the beginning of the end of the National Health Service as we know it in Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: I find it difficult to understand how the hon. Gentleman can argue that changes in the doctors' contract and in the method of delivery of service within the National Health Service that will result in an attack on waiting lists, in doctors being encouraged to give more emphasis to preventive medicine and to provide wider services should be seen as an attack on the National Health Service. Proposals that enable patients to change their doctor more easily or to ensure that their doctor is available to visit them at weekends and at night will be widely welcomed by patients and most doctors. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that doctors have expressed alarm, but doctors in Scotland would be wise to wait to see what is on offer before criticising proposals that they have not yet seen.

Mr. Galbraith: The problem is that doctors are aware of some of the proposals and they do not like them. Is the Minister aware that I have received copies of the hundreds of letters that he has received and that not one supports his proposals? Does he agree that one of the concerns in those representations is the list size, which is particular to Scotland? Has the Minister had any success in discussions with his counterparts in England and Wales to ensure that any proposals will take into account the special considerations of the list size in Scotland? Is he aware that we will not be dragged along on the coat tail of a huge list size forced on us to the detriment of doctors, patients and the community?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we have had discussions with the Scottish General Medical Services Committee. As the doctors are organised and negotiate on a United Kingdom basis, they are not able to discuss the particular position in Scotland, but the Scottish Office and Ministers have been addressing that problem. The hon. Gentleman is mistaken about the letters that I have received. There is widespread support among doctors —*[Interruption.]* Almost all doctors, whether in general practice or in hospitals, support our proposals for medical audit and for putting more emphasis on preventive medicine. The hon. Gentleman said that there was no support at all. As usual, he is using simplistic slogans to attack a policy, when he and his party have no alternative other than to commit themselves to undo everything that the Government achieve.

Mr. Steel: Is the Minister aware that the general practitioners in my part of Scotland have written to him opposing those parts of the proposals that relate to general practice? They especially object to his blandishments to increase list sizes to the point where there would need to be group practices covering more than one town and thereby cutting the essential link between a community and its general practice. Will the Minister reconsider that proposal?

Mr. Forsyth: I had a very useful and helpful meeting with a number of doctors in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, who welcomed the broad thrust of the proposals.—*[Interruption.]* Yes, they did. They expressed reservations about certain aspects of the contract that are currently under discussion. I do not believe that it is right for Opposition Members, who have obviously made no attempt to study the details of the proposals, to argue that there is not considerable agreement with what we are seeking to achieve. However, there is certainly argument about whether the methods that we are using are the most appropriate. That is why we have issued working papers and have entered into discussions with the medical profession.

Schools (Opting Out)

8. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning schools opting out in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: As at 4 April 85 representations had been received on the descriptive paper "Self-Governing Schools", which we published in December 1988. These have been made available on a public file.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the major objections to the concept of opt-out schools has come from parents and from groups who are concerned that such schools will no longer cater for children with special educational needs? Does he acknowledge the grounds for such concern and will he undertake, before the opting-out Bill leaves this House, to come forward with amendments that will ensure that opt-out schools will be unable, at any time in the future, to shift the responsibility for such children?

Mr. Rifkind: We all agree that schools that provide for special needs have a particular role in the community. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) has given assurances in Committee with regard to those schools that provide for special needs.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In the past there has been a great deal of interest in the question of Catholic single-sex schools. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, recently, there have been positive expressions of interest from the Church of Scotland and from the Islamic community about using the new legislation? Would my right hon. and learned Friend or my hon. Friend the Minister be favourably disposed in principle, to a meeting with some of those interested at an appropriate time? On an equally positive note will my right hon. and learned Friend congratulate the Labour party on its recent conversion to the principle of parental majority?

Mr. Rifkind: I am always happy to congratulate the Labour party though, sadly, such occasions do not arise very often.

The basic principle to which the Government attach importance is the need to respond to the wishes of parents in the community and the right of parents to influence the kind of education that their children receive. That is a fundamental aspect of any democratic society and it is on that basis that we respond to initiatives that are occasionally brought before us.

Mr. McLeish: Is the Secretary of State aware of the comments by Mrs. Julie Collis of the Scottish Parent Teachers Council who said, in a recent edition of *The Times Educational Supplement* that the Government's handling of the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Bill had left parents breathless and that she found it

disgusting? Why is it that an organisation funded by the Government should feel so aggrieved about a major piece of legislation?

Mr. Rifkind: I read that extract from *The Times Educational Supplement*. I think that Mrs. Collis was concerned as to the pace of the consideration of the Bill in Committee. At the moment we are on clause 7 of the Bill, but according to the hon. Gentleman's press release issued earlier today, it appears that it is the desire of the Labour party that we should be on clauses 13 and 14 shortly. It looks as though the Labour party is anxious to make even quicker progress on this Bill than we are.

Development Agency

9. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of the Scottish Development Agency; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that my right hon. and learned Friend gave a few moments ago to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Welsh: Whatever organisational structures are chosen for Scottish Enterprise, will the Minister assure us that its strategic investment role will neither be diminished nor diluted? In the meantime, is it true that the Scottish Development Agency has lost between 15 and 20 per cent. of its staff and that the uncertainty regarding its future is causing a loss of morale and a loss of staff? That is bad for Scotland. When will the Minister take action on those matters?

Mr. Lang: We have given consideration to such matters as the strategic investment role of the Scottish Development Agency in the context of the submissions that we have received during the consultation period on Scottish Enterprise. Whatever the staff of the SDA may be doing in some parts of Scotland, they must be extremely busy in the hon. Gentleman's constituency because they have to consider the Arbroath project, the Carnoustie golf-related initiatives, the Perth area partnership, work in Brechin converting the Denburn works, the north Angus economic review and the Dundee waterfront project.

Mr. Robert Hughes: As the Secretary of State accepts the great importance of communications so that different parts of Scotland can benefit from the Channel tunnel, will he join me in deploring British Rail's resistance to the electrification of the east coast line between Aberdeen and Edinburgh? Will he encourage his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to put as much pressure on British Rail about this as did the Prime Minister about Kent, to make it change its mind as fast as possible?

Mr. Lang: That must be a commercial decision for British Rail, although I note the interest and concern felt in that part of Scotland about this matter. This is not a matter for the Scottish Development Agency.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the two recent reports which lavished praise on the Scottish economy? The Westminster bank said that it was the best in the United Kingdom, and the Fraser of Allander Institute said that it was performing in line with Tory philosophy.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will have seen the recent index of production and construction, which showed that in the manufacturing, production and construction sectors, the Scottish economy is performing better than the rest of the United Kingdom.

Trunk Roads

10. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his Department's review of trunk roads in the south of Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The study by consultants "Routes South of Edinburgh" is in its final stages. When it has been completed and fully considered, which I expect will be in the summer, I intend to make a statement both about the report's conclusions and about our proposed way ahead.

Mr. Home Robertson: I thought that the Minister was going to say that it would be published in a special edition of *The Observer*. In view of the fact that Ministers feel so strongly about the unity of the United Kingdom, I shall draw the Minister's attention to the missing link on the main A1 road which is supposed to link Edinburgh—*[Interruption.]*—The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is not there either. In view of the increasing congestion on the dangerously inadequate single carriage way between Musselburgh and the English border, and onwards to Morpeth, in particular, as there were 283 injuries and 25 deaths over three years on the Scottish section of the A1, will the Minister undertake to begin the task of completing the A1 dual carriageway, both to save lives and to improve communications in Scotland and internationally?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The casualty rates over the past three years which the hon. Gentleman mentioned have not been unduly high in comparison with those in other district council areas, although they are certainly a subject of grave concern. Dualling is one of the issues addressed by the "Routes South of Edinburgh" study, and accident rates on the present A1 will be fully taken into account. More immediately, a major junction improvement on the A1 at Haddington is planned as well as provision for crawler lanes on the A1 at Pencraig Hill, which will go ahead as soon as the statutory procedures have been completed and the finance is available.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Minister accept the crucial importance of the "Routes South of Edinburgh" review to the border region? When the study is published, will he undertake to meet representatives from the local authorities and Members of the House from East Lothian, the Borders and north Northumberland to consider the detail of that report? Can he cast any light on a report in the Newcastle *Journal* this Monday that a feasibility study by the Department of Transport was under way into a motorway link between Newcastle and Edinburgh?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I made inquiries this morning and understand that the Lothian and Borders regional councils may already be involved in discussions with a group from seven English counties which are investigating the feasibility of a scheme incorporating private finance. The Scottish Office looks forward to being kept in touch with any findings that emerge. With regard

to the area of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), a £7·5 million A1 Tower to Dunglass diversion is planned. A bypass of Langholm on the A70 is under investigation, as well as the realignment of the carriageway from Ancrum House to Harrietfield on the A68. Therefore, a considerable amount of work is taking place.

Mr. Beggs: Can the Minister inform us whether his Department, during the review of trunk roads in the south of Scotland, has taken account of the importance to Northern Ireland hauliers of a good road service south from Cairnryan and Stranraer? Will he also bear in mind that although there are those who wish Northern Ireland to be linked with the Channel tunnel through Dublin, Dun Laoghaire and Holyhead, we in Northern Ireland wish to maintain our close Scottish links and have a proper through route through Stranraer and Cairnryan?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am certain that many hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Minister of State, share the hon. Gentleman's concern. We see the M74 as the major roads priority of the 1990s, but after its upgrading the Euroroute to Stranraer and the A96 upgrading will be seen as equal next priorities.

Confederation of British Industry

11. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Confederation of British Industry, Scotland; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Rifkind: I am in frequent touch with the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland on a range of matters affecting the Scottish economy. I look forward to a continuing exchange of views.

Mr. Oppenheim: Next time my right hon. and learned Friend meets the members of the CBI, will he discuss with them the excellent news of Rolls-Royce's recent substantial orders for aero engines to be put into Boeing and Airbus airlines? Is he aware that much of the work will be placed in Scottish factories? Does that not typify the increasingly bright outlook for the Scottish economy, which includes increased manufacturing output, manufacturing productivity and manufacturing employment but which seems to make Opposition Members extremely glum?

Mr. Rifkind: It is indeed extremely encouraging that Scottish industry is continuing to be so bullish in its order books, its exports and its expectations for further growth and employment. It is particularly welcome that the level of interest rates appears to be having even less effect in retarding the Scottish economy than in retarding the economy elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Worthington: This morning the Secretary of State met leaders of the television industry in Scotland. Will he take serious account of their fears about the future of programme making within Scotland, in view of the Government's White Paper on broadcasting? Will he get together with the CBI and the Scottish Development Agency to ensure that the great opportunity for an expansion of this valuable industry of the future is taken, rather than allowing the centralisation—which seems likely—of programme making within the south-east of England or Los Angeles?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of the industry in Scotland. It is particularly encouraging that at present Scotland contains a larger proportion of independent programme producers than any other part of the United Kingdom outside London. We want broadcasting to enable future further expansion of local programme production, and we also attach importance to the cultural diversity in Scotland which is reflected in the structure of broadcasting as well as in other forms of the media.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that the advent of the single market in 1992 makes improving the infrastructure for Scottish companies crucial? When he meets members of the CBI, will he ask whether they support the campaign to ensure that the electrification of the east coast line continues to Aberdeen, and that the Aberdeen-Inverness route—the A96, the most dangerous road in Scotland—is given the upgrading that is long overdue? Only in that way will visitors to the north of Scotland be able to take full advantage of the single market.

Mr. Rifkind: We all appreciate that. It was for precisely that reason that the present Government provided a dual carriageway from Perth to Aberdeen—and, indeed, the Inverurie bypass, on the very road to which the hon. Gentleman refers, is beginning construction at this moment. We attach considerable importance to the improvement of communications. The north-east, and Aberdeen in particular, is entitled to share the economic opportunities offered by 1992 with the rest of Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Favell: How do the Scottish CBI and others interested in free enterprise in Scotland view the threat to the Union posed by the Labour Party and other Opposition Members who are toying with the Scottish convention? With Socialism out of fashion in Moscow, Kiev and Leningrad, how do they view the possibility of Scotland becoming the last bastion of Socialism in Europe as the Opposition realises that they have no earthly chance in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend can take comfort from the fact that there has never been a majority in Scotland prepared to vote for Socialism. That, I think, is a point on which all parties in the House need to reflect. So far as the views of the CBI are concerned, I noticed that, only yesterday, Mr. Alistair Mair, the deputy chairman of the CBI in Scotland, indicated his belief that any break-up of the United Kingdom, or any major constitutional change, would impose new economic burdens on Scotland, which would deter investment and be contrary to our economic interests.

Childminders

12. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make more funds available to the Scottish Vocational Education Council for the Training of Childminders.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no plans to do so. The Government, through the rate support grant, have provided substantial resources, which have allowed local authorities to increase expenditure on services for the

under-fives from £19·5 million, in 1979-80, to £46·9 million, in 1987-88—an increase, in real terms, of 37 per cent.

Mrs. Fyfe: We all know that this Minister does not give the under-fives any priority, and, in view of what he is doing to the over-fives, that may be just as well. While we are waiting for progress on the training of childminders in sufficient quantities for people's needs, would the Minister advise working women to get together and arrange for one of them to look after the children while the rest go to work? I think that I had better warn the Minister that, in the advice that the Prime Minister gave a few months ago, she was inciting women to break the law.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady does the Government a great disservice. She should be aware that since 1979 the numbers of children attending nursery schools and classes has increased by 23 per cent. The numbers in various forms of day care have increased substantially, and almost 80 per cent. of three and four-year-olds are now the subject of pre-school provision. I had a letter the other day complaining about the two-year backlog in the registration of childminders by Strathclyde regional council, owing, I understand, to some industrial dispute. If the hon. Lady is particularly concerned about childminders, she might use her good offices with the Labour party to sort out that particular problem before coming to central Government.

Community Charge

14. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the number of people in Scotland who will not pay the poll tax.

Mr. Lang: We have made no estimate.

Mr. Canavan: I did not hear the Minister's reply, but what reply did the Secretary of State give to the Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers, which has complained to him about being forced to arrest the bank accounts of customers who have refused to pay fines levied for their failure to register to pay the poll tax? Is it not clear from this, and from last Saturday's massive anti-poll tax demonstration involving about 30,000 people, that the opposition to the poll tax embraces not only the political majority in Scotland but many people from many different walks of life—people from sport, from the arts, community leaders, civic leaders, Church leaders, trade union leaders, and now, apparently, even the bankers? Is everyone out of step except our "Malcy"?

Mr. Lang: My answer to the hon. Gentleman's original question was that we had made no such estimate. So far as the other points that he raises are concerned, he chooses to forget how unpopular and how unfair domestic rates were. What we have introduced is a broader-based and fairer system of contributing to local government. If the hon. Gentleman decides to make a martyr of himself by not paying his community charge, he will be confronting not only the rule of law but the leader of his own party.

Dame Peggy Fenner: Will my hon. Friend, in order to give enormous cheer to the English local authorities, which will be embarking in the near future upon a register of people subject to the community charge, assure me that all those who marched in Scotland were part of a very small proportion of people who did not register? Can he quote the figure that I heard him mention on the radio concerning the number of people who have registered for the community charge?

Mr. Lang: I am happy to assure my hon. Friend that about 99 per cent. of the adult population in Scotland have registered. She may also like to know that most local authorities in Scotland have assumed that at least 95 per cent. of the adult population will pay the community charge.

Mr. Douglas: Will the Minister take time to reflect on the Chancellor of the Exchequer's view that tax remission for the elderly in terms of medical aid should not be means or needs-tested? Will he compare and contrast that with the severe disclosure on which people who are mentally impaired will have to embark in order to avoid payment of the poll tax?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to the elderly. He may like to know that we estimate that about half the pensioner population in Scotland will be eligible for rebates of one form or another and that about 90 per cent. of the single pensioner population in Scotland will benefit as a result of the change from domestic rates to the community charge.

Mr. Harris: Is my hon. Friend able to give the House any information about how many right hon. and hon. Members who sit on the Opposition Benches have made public declarations about their intention to flout the law —*[Interruption.]*—in some cases against the specific advice of the leaders of their parties? Surely every hon. Member has a right to that information.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend will be aware that public declaration and private practice are often very different. However, I shall look with interest to see what action the Leader of the Opposition takes against any Opposition Front Bench Member who does not pay the community charge.

Mr. Dewar: Is the Minister not genuinely concerned about the confusion and chaos that surrounds the rebate system and about the fact that countless thousands of people have not yet lodged applications? Will he guarantee that, if necessary, the system will be altered to ensure that everyone who is genuinely entitled to a rebate will have it backdated to 1 April?

Mr. Lang: We are certainly concerned that anyone who is eligible for a rebate should get one. We calculate that about 30 per cent. of the adult population will be eligible for a rebate. Applications have been received from about two thirds of the likely number and they are being processed very quickly. I hope that the short-term problems that are being experienced by some local authorities will be resolved fairly quickly. However, the Department of Social Security has, exceptionally, granted a concession whereby, for up to 56 days from the due date, it will be possible to obtain a rebate.

Labour Statistics

15. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the level of unemployment in Scotland in April 1979 using the same method of calculating the figures as presently used.

Mr. Lang: In April 1979, seasonally adjusted unemployment in Scotland, on a basis consistent with the current coverage of the count, was 141,000. Since January 1987 seasonally adjusted unemployment in Scotland has fallen by over 87,000.

Mr. Ewing: Is it not true that in April 1979, using exactly the same method of calculation that the Government are using now, unemployment in Scotland was about 90,000? When does the Minister expect this deplorable Government to bring unemployment down to that kind of level?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman plainly did not listen to my answer. I gave him the figure of 141,000. I understand his anxiety that the unemployment figures when his Government left office should be reduced, because he will recall that the last Labour Government presided over a doubling of unemployment during their five years in office. This Government are now more accustomed to falling unemployment.

COSLA

16. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Rifkind: I have arranged to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on Friday 28 April to begin consultations on the revenue support grant settlement for 1990-91.

Mr. McAllion: Will the Secretary of State take that opportunity to discuss with COSLA the current round of competitive tendering and the fact that multinational companies such as Sitaclean and United Kingdom Waste have been showing an interest in picking up local authority contracts in Scotland? Will he explain to COSLA and to the rest of us how the awarding of contracts to multinational companies, whose headquarters are respectively in Paris and London, is an example of the Government devolving real power and control to the Scottish people?

Mr. Rifkind: Irrespective of whether a local authority or a company carries out the services, I presume that they will employ local people. Therefore the implications for employment are the same, irrespective of where the employer is based. The objective of competitive tendering is to ensure a good quality of service for the local community in order that the resources available can be used to the maximum benefit of the community.

Newbattle Abbey College

17. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the individuals and organisations he consulted before making the decision to withdraw funding from Newbattle abbey college, Dalkeith, Midlothian.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend consulted the governors and the trustees before his announcement on 9 March.

Mr. Eadie: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that his answer is not strictly correct? In the meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) the Secretary of State confessed to us that the reason that he took the decision was because he was asked by the Scottish Education Department to take the decision; he never consulted anybody. Is it not deplorable that the Secretary of State is not prepared to come to the Despatch Box and defend his own decision? Will the hon. Gentleman convey to his right hon. and learned Friend that, if the argument is about finance, more time should be allowed to the college so that it can change from the present structure of financing to another?

Mr. Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend gave the governors of Newbattle 18 months' notice of his intention to withdraw grant. Hon. Members on the Opposition Benches were among those who argued that the local authorities and the trade unions would wish to support the college. In the event, the college governors found that they were able to get commitments of only some £30,000 from the local authorities and from trade union sources. This seems to endorse my right hon. and learned Friend's judgment that the type of education on offer at Newbattle is an anachronism and that the emphasis which we have placed on adult education, which has resulted in more than 6,000 people benefiting from adult education on a full-time basis in Scotland, is the correct way forward, compared with the 40 places on offer at Newbattle. I regret to say, therefore, that the governors looked for support and found that it was not forthcoming.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw to your attention, and seek your advice on, something that the Prime Minister said to the House yesterday and that has considerable implications for the House?

In reply to a question put to her by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston), the Prime Minister said:

"The hon. Gentleman can read for himself the report of the secretary general to the United Nations Security Council".

She went on to say:

"he can also obtain for himself a copy of the Geneva protocols which were specifically agreed to by SWAPO. All those are public knowledge, and the hon. Gentleman can get them from the Library at any time."

The Prime Minister used documents yesterday to make an attack on one side in Namibia, that is, SWAPO, but the fact is that the secretary general's report to the United Nations Security Council was not publicly available yesterday when she said that it was. It was not in the House of Commons Library then and it is not in the Library now.

More seriously, the documents that she referred to as the "Geneva protocols", which led her to say in her answer,

"SWAPO committed itself to the Geneva accord under which it is required to stay north of the 16th parallel in Angola"—[*Official Report*, 4 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 15.],

are not available. In *The Guardian* today, Cedric Thornberry, the assistant to the United Nations' special representative in Namibia, is quoted as saying:

"We have no official knowledge of that treaty and so far as I know it has never been published".

Yesterday the Prime Minister was fresh back from Namibia and chose to make a one-sided and partisan attack on SWAPO in a brief reply to a question without making the proper and full statement that the House expected. She did so by citing documents which were not, and in one case cannot be, in the public domain or in the House of Commons Library. This is an inexcusable way of treating the House.

In the face of escalating violence and deaths on Namibia's northern border, there is real concern in this country about the possible collapse of the peace plan, the danger of further killing which may well threaten British troops——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a statement; the hon. Gentleman is raising a point of order with me. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am not responsible for what has been said by the Prime Minister. I will hear the rest of the point of order as long as it is brief.

Mr. Robertson: I am putting to you, Mr. Speaker, the very serious point that on a matter of acute importance to the House, to the country and to British troops serving in Namibia, the Prime Minister cited the existence of extremely important documents, telling us that they were in the House of Commons Library and were publicly available. The fact that they are not publicly available and are still not in the Library must be of genuine concern to all of us and to you.

The House expected the Prime Minister yesterday to come forward with at least some support for the United Nations secretary general in his efforts in Namibia and also possibly support for a British plan on the same lines as were applicable in Zimbabwe. However, we were faced only with partisan invective. As the Prime Minister cited documents that she said were available and were not, and that are important but are not in the public domain, will you, Mr. Speaker, seek to protect the House from such conduct and perhaps ask the Prime Minister for an explanation?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for what is said at Question Time.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): The hon. Gentleman went rather wide of the point of order. I have *Hansard* in front of me. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), that was the principal answer. It was only in answer to a supplementary question that she referred to some documents. I understand that she was not correct in what she said and that the documents were not in the Library. I understand that arrangements are being made for copies of the agreement and the Geneva protocols to be placed in the Library this afternoon. It was a genuine mistake on the part of my right hon. Friend. I apologise to the House for any inconvenience that has occurred, but I understand that the documents will be put in the Library this afternoon.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not see how it can be a point of order to me. The Leader of the House has made a comment about the matter, but I will hear the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Williams: We have observed the increasing practice of the Prime Minister, in the middle of Prime Minister's questions, of making limited statements on which there can be no further questions, so using up valuable time. When the Prime Minister makes a mistake, why should she not observe the same rules as the rest of us? Instead of sending a messenger along to say, "Please, I am sorry, but as I am Prime Minister you will ignore it," why on earth does not the right hon. Lady have the guts to come here herself to say that she was wrong and that she misled the House?

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is a different point of order on which I ask for your ruling. I will be brief. The point of order relates to your ruling yesterday in respect of the sub judice rule as it affects the Department of Trade and Industry report on the House of Fraser. I should like you to confirm that, although the sub judice rule applies during our deliberations at Question Time and on statements, it does not apply when the House of Commons or the other House is discussing legislation. When we are discussing the passage of Bills, where it is relevant, the sub judice rule does not apply. I seek your confirmation and guidance on that.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know about the other House, but I can confirm that that is so in this House.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Further to the first point of order, Mr. Speaker. I did not catch everything that the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, but it sounded to me very much——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that there is anything that I can add to what the Leader of the House said.

Mr. Hamilton *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: In equity, I will hear the hon. Gentleman, but it must be a point of order for me to answer.

Mr. Hamilton: It sounded very much as though the Labour party is supporting the bunch of terrorists that is trying to sabotage the independence of Namibia.

Mr. Speaker: I think that we are off on an extension of Question Time.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order Mr. Speaker. In the list of amendments to the Electricity Bill, amendment No. 169 has been incorrectly recorded as standing in my name——

Mr. Speaker: We shall deal with that when we come to the Bill.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Further to the earlier point of order, Mr. Speaker, about the Prime Minister's answer yesterday. I am grateful to the Leader of the House for apologising for part of the mistake. Is he aware that there were further misleading statements? The Prime Minister said clearly that there was no provision for SWAPO bases inside the country. There are published documents that state the contrary. It is up to you, Mr. Speaker, on a matter as grave as this, with such tremendous issues at stake, to ensure that the Prime Minister, who returned from Namibia only two or three days ago, is compelled to come to the House and make a statement to withdraw the totally wrong allegations that she made against SWAPO.

Mr. Speaker: The House knows that I cannot be held responsible for what is said from the Dispatch Box or from the Back Benches. There will be other opportunities for hon. Members to raise the matter, doubtless even tomorrow.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on a different matter?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, Mr. Speaker. As you will be aware, those responsible are still deliberating over the question of televising the House. In the meantime, we have to watch television programmes about politics and other matters. From what I gather, on Friday night, on Channel 4, there will be an interesting programme about the life and times of the Prime Minister and that it will suggest that Leon Brittan is reported as saying that Bernard Ingham and Charles Powell deliberately leaked the Solicitor-General's letter about Westland. If so, that confirms what my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said about the Prime Minister continually misleading the House. If that is the case, she should be brought here to explain.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know what the programme will say——

Mr. Skinner: I urge you to watch it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I should like to watch it, but I shall be holding a constituency surgery.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your help and guidance. Elements of war have broken out in relation to agreements by which we were bound. That is the situation in Namibia. There must be some means by which a responsible Minister can be made to come to the House to make a statement on that subject. Apart from the needs of the House, it is imperative that that is done for the sake of the issue that is involved. The Leader of the House is in his place. Can it be put to him, through you, Mr. Speaker, that a statement is required and should be made and the inaccurate statements about the situation withdrawn?

Mr. Speaker: An opportunity will arise at Prime Minister's Question Time tomorrow, if the House wishes to pursue the subject. There will also be business questions tomorrow. The Leader of the House will have heard what has been said, and doubtless there may be the possibility of the House debating the matter.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to raise a point of order on a different matter?

Mr. Boateng: Further to the response of the Leader of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for me. We have a very busy day ahead and I suggest that we should now get on.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point concerns the disciplining of a Member of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was banned from the House because of a remark that he made about the Prime Minister. If, however, it turns out that what he said was basically true—that the information was leaked on the direct instructions of the Prime Minister's press secretary and private secretary, which does not seem to be any longer in dispute as a result of what Sir Leon Brittan has said—then surely my hon. Friend was perfectly right——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not intend to be drawn into an argument about a programme that none of us has yet seen.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: By leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Sea Fish) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 529) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the matter of Housing in Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

Mr. Tony Banks: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been standing on my feet waiting to put a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman, who is a former Whip, knows that when Mr. Speaker is on his feet he must resume his seat. However, if he wishes to raise a point of order on a different matter, and if it will be helpful to us, I will take it.

Mr. Banks: We former Whips should stick together, Mr. Speaker.

I would like you to expound a little more, if you would, Mr. Speaker, on the question of the sub judice rule. I understood that sub judice was involved when a matter was before the court and that if we discussed the issue in the House we might prejudice the opinions of a jury. I do not understand how the sub judice rule applies to the DTI report on Lonrho and the Harrods takeover. It appears that we are talking about a report in which the Fayeds have been described as a bunch of liars——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We former Whips should certainly keep together. If the hon. Gentleman would like to have a private tutorial with me, I shall be very pleased to instruct him.

Unprescribed Spectacles (Health Warnings)

3.44 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make it compulsory to display health warnings where spectacles are sold without prescription.

Under the Health and Medicines Act 1988 it is legal for spectacles to be sold over the counter without a prescription. The practice is restricted to spectacles which have simple magnifying lenses to help people with reading difficulties. Nevertheless, it is likely to become extremely dangerous as it militates against the early discovery of eye disease.

It is common ground that a significant amount of eye disease such as glaucoma is discovered, entirely incidentally, during regular eye check-ups. Very often the patient has such a check-up because of deteriorating vision and ordinary reading difficulties, the eye test is carried out and quite apart from the vision defect the incipient disease is discovered. Under the new system, people between 40 and 50 who might normally expect their reading sight to deteriorate will, in effect, be able to prescribe their own spectacles without any eye check-up or any prescription by trying out various lenses until they reach the ones with which they are most comfortable.

I do not wish to prevent anyone from being able to buy cheap spectacles without the hassle of a test and a prescription, but people should be aware that by forfeiting the chance of an eye test and properly prescribed spectacles they run the risk of incipient disease remaining undiscovered. More seriously, some people have vision defects directly attributable to eye disease, but if they find spectacles which make reading more comfortable they may assume that those spectacles are right for them and the more serious causes of their vision defects will not be discovered. No two eyes are alike. When a person is prescribed spectacles by a practising optician, the specification for each lens is likely to differ, if only by an infinitesimal amount. Individuals prescribing their own spectacles are not likely to obtain that precise variation and thus are likely to be wearing spectacles which do not exactly suit their requirements.

Medical opinion seems to have gone into reverse and now says that no damage is done to adults' sight by wearing the wrong spectacles. If that is so, when the Government were deregulating the provision of frames, why were they so particular to keep the dispensing of lenses separate? I and other hon. Members raised those points during the proceedings on the Health and Medicines Bill and the then Minister promised that the Government would consider the possibility of displaying health warnings where spectacles are sold, warning people of the dangers of forgoing the eye test.

There is no reason to suppose that that would be remotely deleterious to those selling spectacles without prescription. The warning would not be against the spectacles themselves—it would simply stress that regular eye tests can prevent eye disease. No reputable dealer could have any possible objection to displaying such a warning on the counter where people are self-prescribing. Such people may be self-prescribing for the second or even the third time, which would suggest that for six years they have missed the opportunity to have regular eye

check-ups. Individuals would have a choice. They could buy the spectacles and forget the eye check-up, they could take notice of the warning and perhaps buy the spectacles but have the eye check-up anyway, or they could have the eye check-up and then obtain properly prescribed spectacles.

It is a well-established principle that where there is likely to be danger to an individual from any course of action, whether it be smoking or anything else, a warning is issued. We would greatly improve preventive eye medicine if, in conjunction with the deregulation of the provision of reading spectacles, warnings were issued about the relevance of the eye check for disease rather than simply the correction of vision defects.

I believe that the Bill is essential and is in no way in opposition to the spirit of the Health and Medicines Act 1988.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Miss Ann Widdecombe, Dame Jill Knight, Mr. David Blunkett, Mr. David Amess, Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. David Alton, and Mr. David Shaw.

UNPRESCRIBED SPECTACLES (HEALTH WARNINGS)

Miss Ann Widdecombe accordingly presented a Bill to make it compulsory to display health warnings where spectacles are sold without prescription: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 July and to be printed. [Bill 111.]

Orders of the Day

Electricity Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Ordered,

That the Bill be considered in the following order, namely, new Clauses, Clause 1, Schedule 1, Clause 2, Schedule 2, Clauses 3 to 9, Schedules 3 to 5, Clauses 10 to 22, Schedule 6, Clauses 23 to 29, Schedule 7, Clauses 30 to 33, Schedule 8, Clauses 34 and 35, Schedule 9, Clauses 36 to 64, Schedule 10, Clauses 65 to 83, Schedule 11, Clauses 84 to 90, Schedule 12, Clauses 91 to 94, Schedule 13, Clauses 95 to 104, Schedules 14 to 16, Clause 105, and new Schedules.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

New Clause 4

DISCHARGE ETC. OF CERTAIN ADVANCES AND LOANS MADE TO EXISTING BODIES

'.—(1) The following powers, namely—

(a) the power conferred on the Secretary of State by subsection (3) of section 2 of the Electricity and Gas Act 1963 to give directions as the repayment of advances made by him under that section to the Electricity Council; and

(b) the power conferred on the Secretary of State by subsection (2) of section 24 of the Electricity (Scotland) Act 1979 to give directions as to the repayment of advances made by him under that section to a Scottish Board,

shall include power to direct the Council or Board to discharge its liabilities in respect of any advance so made by a payment to him, on such date as is specified in the direction, of such amount as is so specified.

(2) The Treasury may direct the Electricity Council or a Scottish Board to do anything specified in the direction which is requisite or expedient for the purpose of securing the discharge, or the transfer to the Treasury, of the Council's or Board's liabilities in respect of any foreign currency loan made to the Council or Board.

(3) Where the liabilities of the Electricity Council or a Scottish Board in respect of any foreign currency loan made to the Council or Board are to be discharged (whether in pursuance of a direction under subsection (2) above or otherwise), the Treasury may direct that the amount to be paid to the Treasury by the Council or Board for the foreign currency required for the purpose of securing the discharge shall be such amount as is specified in the direction.

(4) Where the liabilities of the Electricity Council or a Scottish Board in respect of any foreign currency loan made to the Council or Board are to be transferred to the Treasury (whether in pursuance of a direction under subsection (2) above or otherwise), the Treasury may direct the Council or Board to pay the Treasury, on the date of the transfer, such amount as is specified in the direction.

(5) The amount specified in a direction under subsection (1), (3) or (4) above shall be the aggregate of the present values (calculated in such manner and by reference to such rate of interest as the Secretary of State with the approval of the Treasury or, as the case may be, the Treasury may determine) of—

(a) in the case of a direction under subsection (1), the payments which, if the Council's or Board's liabilities in respect of the advance were not discharged before the final date, would fall to be made to the Secretary of State in respect of the advance;

(b) in the case of a direction under subsection (3) or (4), the payments which, if the Council's or Board's liabilities in respect of the loan were not discharged or transferred before the final date, would fall to be made the Treasury under the relevant exchange cover agreement.

(6) The Secretary of State may direct the Electricity Council to exercise its powers under section 21 of the

Electricity Act 1957 in relation to any amount which falls to be paid by the Council in pursuance of a direction under subsection (1), (3) or (4) above in such manner as is specified in the direction under this subsection; and such a direction may in particular require contributions to be made by all or any of the Electricity Boards in England and Wales in such amounts as are specified in the direction.

(7) Any sums received by the Secretary of State in pursuance of a direction under subsection (1) above or by the Treasury in pursuance of a direction under subsection (4) above shall be paid into the National Loans Fund; and any sums received by the Treasury in pursuance of a direction under subsection (3) above shall be paid into the Exchange Equalisation Account.

(8) In this section—

"the final date", in relation to an advance or loan, means the date on which the final payment in respect of the advance or loan falls to be made;

"foreign currency" means a currency other than sterling;

"foreign currency loan" means a loan made wholly or mainly in a foreign currency;

"the relevant exchange cover agreement", in relation to a foreign currency loan, means the agreement made under section 1 of the Exchange Equalisation Account Act 1979 with respect to the payments falling to be made in respect of that loan.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 68 to 72.

Mr. Spicer: This new clause was the subject of the Ways and Means resolution we debated last night. Amendments Nos. 68 to 72, which are grouped with the new clause, relate to the money resolution which was also before the House last night.

In the case of England and Wales, it makes sense for all the long-term debt of the industry, including its foreign debt, to be repaid when the successor companies are set up. In that way, the companies can be properly structured financially in preparation for the private sector where their borrowing will no longer be protected and constrained by rules appropriate to the public sector.

Until flotation, while the companies remain in the public sector, they will be able to borrow for short-term purposes from the national loans fund under clause 72 and to have Treasury guarantees on market borrowing under the proposed amendment No. 68 to clause 73. That will cease when the companies are privatised.

In Scotland, where the debts of the industry are much larger than in England and Wales, the long-term debt will be converted into debentures, issued share capital and reserves after vesting.

During the debate on the money resolution I set out the need for amendments Nos. 69 to 72, which set the borrowing limits of the industry in England and Wales at £2,000 million. In the context of an industry with a turnover of £11 billion, that is by no means a large borrowing limit. It has to be seen in the context of present borrowing, which is about £1·6 billion.

The question of continued parliamentary scrutiny was raised in the debate last night, especially by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). Under clause 73, each issue of a Treasury guarantee requires a written statement to be laid before both Houses of Parliament and, under clause 72, each financial year the Secretary of State will have to prepare an account of transactions from and to the national loans fund and will have to lay it before Parliament.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): We understand that that is the position under clauses 72 and 73. In relation to subsection (1) of new clause 4, it is likely that restructuring will go ahead before flotation and that the capital restructuring will be completed before then. Debts will be paid off in England and Wales.

The Minister referred to the debts of the Scottish industry, which were accumulated largely as a result of investment in nuclear electricity, especially at Torness, and said that those debts will be changed into a combination of debentures, issued share capital and reserves. How much will that cost the British taxpayer? It seems that, once again, the debts of nuclear power will be written off for it to go into the private sector.

On subsection (2), will the Minister confirm that foreign currency debts in England and Wales will be wholly paid off before the flotation of the companies and that Scotland will have the bulk of that debt paid off? What is the foreign currency debt of the Scottish industry, and how much of it will still be outstanding when the electricity industry is floated into the private sector?

Under subsection (6), the Electricity Council will be able to levy repayments of debt from the boards. Does the Minister envisage any disadvantage to the boards if that exercise takes place before the companies are floated? The boards in England and Wales differ in their economic structures and the consumers they supply. Does the Minister believe that any areas will be disadvantaged when the debts that the boards owe the Electricity Council are reclaimed?

Mr. Spicer: At the end of March, the Scottish boards had £1,591 million in outstanding debt to the national loans fund, £1,019 million outstanding in foreign borrowings and £500 million in short-term deposits. Those figures contrast with the position elsewhere. There is no disguising the fact that that is one reason why the Scottish companies must be treated differently from other companies with respect to the repayment of borrowings. For the English companies, that repayment will not be a difficult matter, as they have considerable deposits which could be used to finance the repayment of borrowings—at least in part.

I cannot answer directly the question about the exact nature of restructuring and it is not reasonable to expect the Government to do so. It is some time yet until the companies are floated, and that is the point at which the balance sheets and the financial structure of the companies should be laid out.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Spicer: I will, but I will answer the hon. Gentleman's question first about whether the area boards will be disadvantaged if their deposits are used for the repayment of debt. The answer is no. When we restructure the finances and balance sheets of the area board companies, which we shall do before flotation, we shall ensure that there is no disadvantage incurred in the way suggested—properly—by the hon. Gentleman. I can give him that assurance.

4 pm

Mr. Barron: The Minister says that the Government feel that it would be unreasonable and inconvenient for them to tell us exactly how the restructuring of the debt in Scotland will take place. Does he agree that the taxpayer should know exactly the amount that will be seen as a write-off? It cannot be unreasonable for us to hear the exact amount, even if it is given in percentage terms. Exactly how much will this cost the British taxpayer?

Mr. Spicer: Of course the exact cost to the British taxpayer will be known. In none of the privatisations with which I have been associated—I have been associated with several in recent years—have we come before Parliament with the financial restructuring until closer to the date of the privatisation. That programme is as yet not fixed, and when the time comes there will, of course, be a full disclosure of what, if any, write-offs will occur and any costs that there would therefore be to the public purse.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 5

ADDITIONAL TERMS OF SUPPLY

'. A public electricity supplier may require any person who requires a supply of electricity in pursuance of section 15(1) above to accept in respect of the supply—

(a) any restrictions which must be imposed for the purpose of enabling the supplier to comply with regulations under section 27 below; and

(b) any terms restricting any liability of the supplier for economic loss resulting from negligence which it is reasonable in all the circumstance for that person to be required to accept.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 12 to 14, 16, 17 to 21, and 26.

Mr. Spicer: New clause 5 allows the public electricity supplier to require anyone requesting a supply to accept certain additional terms on that supply. However, it will not weaken the obligation to supply electricity. That is because the new terms will apply only to two specific aspects of the supply. It is also because if there is any dispute over the terms of supply, the consumer will have the right to ask for an independent determination by the director under clause 21. Under amendment No. 13, which is in this group, the customer will be informed of that right.

The first of the contexts in which additional terms of supply will be permitted is in respect of safety. At present, the Bill does not allow the supplier to impose the restrictions necessary to allow him to comply with safety regulations. That could give rise to a potential anomaly. The supplier could be obliged to provide a supply under clause 15 although in doing so he would contravene the requirements of regulations made under clause 27 on safety. The new clause would therefore give the supplier the right to impose restrictions on the supply where necessary to enable him to comply with those safety regulations.

The second area in which terms could be imposed by the supplier under new clause 5 will ensure that consumers in general are provided with secure supplies without any need for expensive price increases. As the Bill stands, a consumer would have the right to take action for any losses suffered as a result of negligence. It is right that in general such a remedy should be available to consumers. We would expect suppliers to take out normal commercial insurance to cover that possibility. However, in some instances a couple of seconds of lost power could have highly significant effects, especially in these days when so such dependence is placed on computers. There could be little or no——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Minister should talk about computer breakdowns.

Mr. Spicer: I shall talk to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) afterwards to explain just how inaccurate was his intervention on this last night. I shall be happy to debate that matter with him if he wishes to intervene. I will not discuss it outside the Chamber—the hon. Gentleman often addresses us outside the Chamber—but I am happy to debate it inside the Chamber.

There might be little or no actual physical loss, but the economic consequences could be major, far outstripping the actual value of any supply lost. In cases in which the degree of sensitivity to the loss of supply is so much greater than normal, under the Bill as it stands the supplier would have to take on the role of insurer for the consumer involved. The costs of insurance in such cases are likely to be high and could be met only through increased charges to consumers as a whole. We do not believe that it is justified to require the mass of consumers to face increased charges because of the particular sensitivity to loss of supply of a very small number of consumers.

To avoid that outcome, the new clause would enable the public electricity suppliers to impose additional terms restricting liability for economic loss so far as it is reasonable in the circumstances to do so. The restriction of liability would not apply to physical loss or damage but only to economic loss, and only to the extent that the restriction was reasonable. Any dispute over a restriction would come within the provisions of clause 21, allowing for independent determination by the director.

In the light of that explanation, I am sure that the House will welcome the new clause for the protection that it affords for the safety of supply and for consumers generally.

The other Government amendments are drafting amendments or consequential on new clause 5, except for amendment No. 13, to which I have already referred, and amendments Nos. 16, 21 and 26. Amendment No. 16 meets the points raised in Committee and provides that whenever a supplier serves a notice requiring security from an existing consumer he must at the same time inform the consumer of his right to have any dispute over that security determined by the director.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Member nods. That point was raised in Committee and the Government brought forward the amendment to meet our assurance.

Amendment No. 21 makes the continuation of an existing supply while any dispute affecting it is determined a matter for the director's discretion. Amendment No. 26 ensures that the director will be able to use his enforcement powers in respect of any breach of the provisions of new clause 5.

[Mr. Spicer]

I hope that the House will feel able to accept new clause 5 and the associated amendments.

Mr. Barron: It is strange that after weeks in Committee the Government have come forward on Report to add things to the hastily cooked-up piece of ideology known as the Electricity Bill. On Second Reading and in Committee there was a strong statement by the Government to the effect that the duty of supply will be as never before—that we shall get away from the 50-yard rule in terms of domestic dwellings, and so on, and that we shall have a better electricity supply than we had in the public sector for many decades. Moreover, we were told, if anything fails and the lights go out we shall be able to get compensation from the successor companies.

Now, however, it seems that that may not be the case. The successor companies may have told the Government what the cost had been to the public sector over the years and what it might be to the private sector if there were a loss of electricity, especially to sensitive users such as commerce or industry, or indeed to domestic premises.

The Minister has partly answered the question that I was about to put to him, but what does the new clause mean in relation to the regulations in clause 27? The Minister says that it is all to do with safety, and I accept that, but does it mean any change in the present position? What is the current relationship between the right of supply and any safety regulations which might be seen to interfere?

Paragraph (b) concerns interruption of supply and the restriction on a supplier's liability. What happens at present if there is a power cut in a sensitive area, perhaps in a high-tech or industrial company? What obligations do the current area boards have in relation to insurance and a consumer's right to claim from them if there has been a major loss? Will there be a change in the present procedure and, if so, why? Will the new successor boards be feather-bedded against the actual cost of failing to meet a demand of a consumer with whom they have contracted in one form or another? Those questions appear relevant and must be answered by the Minister.

We are now at the Report stage of a Bill which was supposed to be the best thing ever for electricity generation and supply. Yet every time we meet to discuss it we have to accept amendments and new clauses which apparently seek to protect the industry from the problems that will be caused by putting this public utility into the private sector.

Mr. Beith: The new clause and the series of amendments grouped with it include some useful improvements to the Bill. The Minister referred to the one that will enable the customer to know his rights. That is something for which we pressed in Committee and I am glad that it has been included. Looking at the position so far, the inclusion of the restriction on liability is necessary, but, if the debate goes a little further, I may be persuaded another way. However, taking the Bill as it stood, all the amendments and the new clause together, the right to supply is still not what it appears to be, primarily because of the financial implications involved.

It is all very well for someone to have a right to require an electricity board to supply electricity, but if the company can then turn round and say, "Yes, you have that right and we will exercise it, but the estimated cost is £2,500," that right does not amount to a row of beans. In my constituency, for example, charges of £115,000 for three properties, £200,000 for 10 properties and £3,906 for one property fewer than four miles from the centre of the town of Berwick have been quoted.

It is not merely that the companies in estimating the cost of providing the right to supply are likely to be very tough or demanding, but that they will argue that they have no right to in any way subsidise one consumer at the expense of others. Therefore, the amendments and the new clause will not be effective in the absence of any provision that would specifically allow and encourage the companies to meet the objective of providing electricity supplies throughout the country.

In this day and age it is surely a reasonable objective that wherever practically possible homes should have access to an electricity supply. If that were not so, the Government would not provide for the obligation to supply. Although they have not done so for gas, the Government consider it reasonable for every home to have a connection to the mains electricity supply. That will not be achieved, however, at the sort of prices being charged to remaining homes.

If those remaining homes had been in the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board area, up to now none of them would have had to pay more than £600. That in itself is quite a high charge, but at least the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board is backed by provisions that require it to have regard to the general development of the area and allow it to meet the cost of extending the electricity supply. The result is that in an area where many properties are more remote than they are in England, the level of connection of properties to the electricity supply is higher. Not many people realise that in the remotest Highlands of Scotland the proportion of properties connected to mains electricity is higher than in Northumberland, in Devon and in a number of other rural parts of Britain.

The time has surely come to clear up the remaining gaps in the electricity supply system, but the duty to supply as set out in the Bill and in the amendments is not sufficiently strong to do that. The Government could have made that duty stronger and they could have introduced amendments on the lines of the amendments that we introduced in Committee. Our amendments would have given the companies at least the opportunity, preferably the obligation, to continue the work of extending the electricity supply and to use some of the large funds that will be made available to them to do that. As it is, they will try to load on to every customer the cost of extending the supply and often that cost will be high.

4.15 pm

I am sorry to say that, despite the minor improvements in the new clause and associated amendments, a duty to supply will not be a reality for thousands of people in this country. They still have to manage without any electricity or they face the almost impossible task of trying to run two or three domestic appliances off a generator. As I told the Committee, anyone who has had the experience of trying to run a washing machine, a television and a few electric lights off a small generator on a dark winter's night knows that it is not much fun. That does not contribute to bringing up a family in reasonable conditions.

Farm workers, shepherds, and other people living and working in the countryside will have to put up with such a way of life for a great deal longer unless better provisions than those in the Bill are made.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke about minor improvements, but "mini-minor" improvements might be a better description.

In Committee we agreed with the hon. Gentleman about the problems of rural supply and I am sure that he shares my belief that there will not be a massive eagerness on the part of private generators to supply small-scale customers in our remote areas. The proposed improvements will not take us very far in that direction.

In common with my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) I recall the ebullient and sweeping speech made by the Secretary of State on Second Reading. The central point of his speech was that we would have masses of competition, new suppliers, enormous improvement and dramatic change. I told the Secretary of State then that I did not think that he had read his own Bill because clause 15 hedges everything about to the point that the right hon. Gentleman's sweeping and ebullient claims are somewhat—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) perhaps describes it more effectively than I would have done.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Spell it.

Mr. Hardy: I have no intention of spelling it. The comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover was entirely justified if not entirely in place.

At the time of Second Reading the Secretary of State had not read clause 15. It is obvious that the claims that he then made and the posture that he adopted was hedged about to such an extent that his claims were questionable. To add further hedging with the new clause warrants further comment.

It is interesting that new clause 5(b) demonstrates that, at last, the Government accept that negligence is possible. It is a modest contribution to the Government's realisation that negligence is encountered from time to time. As the months pass we may see more examples of such negligence in the Bill and the subsequent privatisation.

I hope that we do not vote against the new clause, but it is worth putting on the record that, once again, it adds further contradictions to the claims made by the Secretary of State on Second Reading.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): First, I welcome the Secretary of State who is in his place today. We really did not see a lot of him Upstairs in Committee when we did all the graft.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Come off it.

Mr. Haynes: I do not know why the junior Minister says, "Come off it." Is he protecting the Secretary of State? I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman can look after himself. We intend to argue about what the Government want to do about the privatisation of electricity and I hope that the junior Minister, who will reply at the end of the debate, will keep his mouth closed for a minute and listen to what is said instead of yatting away to his right hon. Friend at his side. That happens all the time, and it is wrong. Afterwards, some of these Ministers say that they do not remember what an hon. Member said, or what the Opposition said. Is it any wonder when they are sitting gas-bagging on the Treasury Bench? Ministers must listen to what is being said.

I remember the speech made by the Secretary of State on Second Reading about the dramatic changes that were going to take place. He also talked about something else —consumer rights. We talked about consumer rights in Committee and we know what sort of consumer rights that there will be. I experienced them not long ago in my constituency—under the present regime.

My hon. Friend for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) talked about when power is cut off and the difficulties that the consumer will then face, but what about upsurges of power which can damage people's property—their washing machines, refrigerators, televisions and God knows what? When we were in Committee I did not hear the junior Minister describe how the consumer would be looked after if that happened. Consumers want to know exactly what help they will receive, and what rights they will have. It is all right for the Secretary of State to nod and say "yes" but we want real answers to these questions. What sort of compensation or help will consumers get when there is an upsurge of power—as happens all the time? Not long ago, I experienced that in my own constituency, in the wonderful little village of Selston.

I do not suppose that the Secretary of State knows anything about Selston. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) does, because his constituency is not far down the road and he lives not far away. He knows what a wonderful little place it is. A row of houses suffered an upsurge of power which affected a number of consumers. I took the matter up with the area board but, to start with, it did not want to know. Therefore, I went and banged on the door in the hope that I had the support of the Secretary of State for Energy. I sorted it out in the end—[HON. MEMBERS: "Well done."] I am talking about the little village of Selston, which is only a minute patch on the map of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Skinner: I wonder whether Selston is the village which had a unique system of paying electricity bills many years ago under the old regime. Meters were emptied and people would receive rebates. Some people put pit washers in the meter instead of two bob pieces and asked, "What happens if you put in more washers than there is rebate?" They were told that it would be left over until the next month. A new inspector arrived and stopped that practice. One of the fellows said, "He has broken custom and practice so I am refusing to allow this new regime to apply." His electricity supply was cut off and he went to his Member of Parliament and said, "Will you get my electricity restored?" His Member of Parliament said that he would try. The fellow said, "I have got four kids and no lights or telly—nothing." The Member of Parliament said, "I will give you some candles." The man said, "Don't bother. I'm connected up with him next door." Is that the same village?

Mr. Haynes: It is the same on Report as it was in Committee, where Conservative Members received an education about this sort of thing. I shall come to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover but I shall make an additional point. My hon. Friend is right. That is what used to happen. Those so-called coins, made in the blacksmith's shop, were really efficient at the job: they fitted exactly. Those people knew what they were

[Mr. Haynes]

doing. I do not know what those at the Treasury would have said if they had known that coins were being made for the meters on National Coal Board blacksmiths' premises. But the Secretary of State has cheated those people: they now have to put in a card rather than a coin, or so-called coin.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover knows as well as I do that those coins can no longer be made because they have closed the damn pit. The Secretary of State laughs, but 1,100 people lost their jobs in that village when the Government closed the pit and stopped them from making those coins for the meter.

Mr. Skinner: Is not the moral of the story that the new owners of the electricity industry will have a double handful down in Selston and places like it? The Minister would do well to tell the potential purchasers about the trouble that they will have in collecting the money.

Mr. Haynes: That is one of the reasons why we have suggested to the Government that they should not privatise the industry. At present money is being poured into those people's pockets in massive tax reductions, but privatisation will bring real problems.

I am standing here, however, because I am concerned about the consumers. I am one of them. I live just down the road from the wonderful little village of Selston, in the constituency of Ashfield, in the beautiful county of Nottinghamshire. Even the Secretary of State is being given an education this afternoon. He was not in Committee very often to be educated, but his junior Minister was always there—and listened sometimes, although he did not give us the answers that we wanted.

I hope that we will be given an answer this afternoon. Will consumers really get their rights, or will they be robbed? Will they be taken for a ride by the so-called electricity experts who will move in and buy up our industry if the Government get away with this Bill and it becomes an Act? My fear is that under the Bill and the present Administration the consumer will not get a fair deal.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Mr. Deputy Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer that lot."] I certainly will answer that lot, because it is easily answerable. First, however, let me reply to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). The hon. Gentleman asked what changes were being made to the present position. Existing safety regulations will apply. What has changed is that for the first time we are talking about consumers, who will have a right to supply. Whatever anyone says—for instance, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—no one who lives more that 50 yd from a mains supply now has such a right. Of course supply is cost-related, but should the potential consumer feel that he has been overcharged he will for the first time have the right to appeal to the Director General of Electricity Supply.

The other change is that the obligation to supply has been switched to the electricity distribution company. That is one reason why we must ensure that the obligation relates to, and does not completely override, the need for safety regulations to apply.

I turn to the remarks of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), who is again behaving like a Whip, having gone all quiet on the Front Bench.

Mr. Haynes: I will not allow the Minister to provoke me. I have behaved myself in the Chamber—which is more than can be said of some hon. Members.

4.30 pm

Mr. Spicer: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if I provoked him with my reference to his having gone quiet. I can see that that may have been a bit provocative. Let me "unprovoke" the hon. Gentleman by saying that he was not quiet a few moments ago. If I may say so, he was talking a lot of rubbish—and I hope that that does not provoke him. I have to say to him and to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)—perhaps, indeed, to all hon. Members—that, far from the Opposition having educated us in Committee, the process was rather the other way round, particularly in respect of the question of consumers. It is quite right that it should be so, because the whole of this Bill is dedicated to the consumer. That is precisely why we are changing the situation, and we have three days on Report to carry on the process of education.

Opposition Members must accept that at present there is a monopoly supplier who determines the costs, whatever those costs may be, and then passes them, without any checks or balances, straight through to the consumer, the person to whom we are addressing ourselves today.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): If this legislation is dedicated to the consumer, will the consumer be able to have a coin-operated meter on demand—something that is not possible at present?

Mr. Spicer: The Bill incorporates arrangements for prepayment—something that no current legislation does. So far as prepayment is concerned, there will be new rights for the consumer that is quite clear.

Mr. Ashton: Will the consumer have the right to ask for the installation of equipment that will enable him to pay by a method other than meeting a big bill after a three-months delay?

Mr. Spicer: Of course, all sorts of things have to be taken into account—for instance, theft and matters to do with security, which must modify what is being done.

At present there are no checks and balances for the consumer. That will be changed radically by this Bill. It is a fundamental point, and it is no bad thing that the hon. Members for Ashfield and for Wentworth have raised it in the context of consumers. It is well to establish firmly on the record again that this Bill changes the situation fundamentally. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) says that prices will be put up. If he wishes to make that kind of comment from a sedentary position, he must tell me why. We know of many projects —20 at the moment, and I am sure that there are many others in the pipeline—whose cost structures are considerably below those of the CEGB, on average. Under the Bill, it will be possible to have new power stations and generating arrangements—something which, by the way, would not be possible or practicable in the present situation.

Far from what the hon. Gentleman has suggested, the pressure on prices will be downward. I agree that the key factor here is which system will do more to put pressure on prices. It is part of our case that the downward pressure will be far greater in the private sector, under the terms of this Bill, than would be the case were the present situation

to persist—for precisely the reasons I have already given: that the present system is one in which a monopoly supplier passes his costs, without any checks or balances, straight through to the consumer. That must be less good, from the point of view of pressure on prices, than the system that we are proposing.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister please explain what he means by downward pressure on prices from the 20 private sector projects? They are attracted to come into the industry only by the price increases that the Secretary of State announced in April 1987 and April 1988. Had the Secretary of State not imposed those price increases, which were double what the industry had asked for, the headroom would be nowhere near what the private sector generators need to attract them into the industry on a competitive basis.

Mr. Spicer: I have a great deal of respect for the hon. Gentleman because of his knowledge of the industry and the way in which he puts his questions, but he has missed the fundamental point that in a private and varied system it is possible to introduce greater efficiency. It is not necessarily the case that private sector generating companies require an artificially high price to be set to attract them into the industry. All that they want is the opportunity to do business. That is precisely what the Bill will give them.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister had not dealt with the exemptions to which I referred when I said that the Secretary of State's ebullience was definitely hedged. According to clause 16, the consumer may have the right to demand a supply, but the supplier has a certain right to refuse to supply.

According to clause 16(2)(a), a public electricity supplier will not be required to give a supply of electricity if

"he is prevented from doing so by circumstances not within his control; or"

if

"(c) it is not reasonable in all the circumstances for him to be required to do so."

Will those circumstances include the remote rural resident who has already been referred to in the debate?

Mr. Spicer: I have already made that point absolutely clear. I have also pointed out—I said earlier that it was the whole point of new clause 5—that certain conditions will be imposed, particularly when safety matters are involved. The supplier will have the right to specify under what conditions he is prepared to undertake the contract. However, those conditions must be reasonable and I have already referred to the kind of circumstances in which conditions could be imposed. We start from the basis of the right to supply. Only in the most extenuating circumstances where the test of reasonableness has been applied and where safety is concerned would the right to supply be modified.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Does the Bill provide any protection for consumers over standing charges? As there is to be competition throughout the country over electricity supplies, will there also be competition over standing charges? Will the fact that the supply network is to be a separate operation result in another standing charge? Water authorities will levy two standing charges. Does the Bill provide any protection so that customers——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I find it difficult to understand the relationship between that point and the new clause.

Mr. Spicer: Standing charges will be essentially the same as they are now. However, the regulator will be able to determine whether the charges are excessive. That will be part of his duties.

Mr. Barron: I thank the Minister for answering my question about the scope of the regulations in terms of new clause 5. He said that there will be no change. However, he has avoided my question about paragraph (b). I shall ask it again so that he knows exactly what I am talking about.

Paragraph (b) refers to restricting the liability of the supplier for economic loss if he fails to supply electricity to a dwelling or to industry, commerce or hospitals. New clause 5 appears to contradict the speech of the Secretary of State for Energy. He referred to the compensation that would be made available to consumers if a public electricity supplier failed to supply electricity. That was incorporated in the White Paper and it was referred to on Second Reading and in Committee. However, it now appears to be suggested that in future consumers will have to insure against economic loss if there is a failure to supply electricity.

Will there be any change, as regards area boards, in the obligation that the area board now has compared with the obligation that the private sector will have because of the Bill? It is important that that point is answered. If there is to be a cushion, we can see that taking the industry into the private sector benefits the consumer not at all but perhaps says to him that he must insure, because the industry will be unable to ensure that there is a supply of electricity.

Mr. Ashton: The Minister has failed abysmally to answer the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes)—my hon. Friend made it in a jocular manner, but it is important—about poor consumers who have great difficulty in paying their bills and who for many years have sought an automatic right to a coin-operated slot meter or to a meter which takes some sort of plastic token which disintegrates when inserted. That is the only way in which any one-parent family or anyone on a low income can enjoy a system of "pay as you burn".

Under such a system, thousands of consumers have found that they can manage to survive without getting into debt simply because if the meter cuts off at 10 o'clock on a Thursday night they go to bed and put the kids to bed or they manage with some sort of food that needs no cooking. That is how they survive when they know that they are coming to the end of the week and the Giro has not yet come. Many of my constituents, in an area with 17 per cent. unemployment, come into that category.

The electricity boards—and, indeed, the gas boards—have always resisted pressure to go back to the old system of collecting from slot meters because they do not want the job. They argue that collectors from meters are often hit on the head when they are collecting, people know when they are coming round and meters can be broken into by local burglars, thus increasing theft. I suspect that the real reason is not the desire to reduce theft but an unwillingness to let consumers know how much they are consuming. They would prefer a system whereby we all get into debt for three months and until the bill comes in none of us knows how much it will be.

[Mr. Ashton]

I wish that someone would invent some sort of meter which poor people could stick on their mantelpiece and which would show them how fast it was going round and how much electricity they were consuming so that they could, for instance, turn off a bar of the fire. It would work the other way as well—at present old people often sit and shiver in winter, terrified to turn on another bar of the fire because they do not know how much electricity it will take.

Power is probably the only product that people consume first and find out the price later. No one would go into a restaurant, order a meal and only after eating it ask how much it cost. Yet we are expected to consume electricity and gas in that way.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does the hon. Member agree with me that the area board statistics for the past three or four years, with their encouragement for pre-payment meters, plastic cards and other tokens, show that they are going in the direction that the hon. Member wishes and will continue to do so after privatisation?

Mr. Ashton: I am coming to that.

We are faced with the problem of people not knowing how much they have consumed until they have consumed it and then being faced with a big bill that they cannot pay. Instead of going down to the area office and explaining, they often let it drift.

The hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) referred to some sort of card. It costs £2 and one can check off how much has been used, but if the card expires on a Saturday or Sunday people cannot get down——

Mr. Mans *rose*——

Mr. Ashton: The hon. Gentleman can make his point afterwards. I am not giving way all the time. If the hon. Gentleman wants to speak, he can speak later.

Occasionally I have received a complaint from a person with a card that it has run out at the weekend and he cannot get a replacement from the local office. In my constituency the local office might be 10 miles away, at Mansfield or Doncaster. Even if he has the money, there may be no bus to take him there. There are other problems, too. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wyre should not be too impatient. We have three days on this Bill so it is no use him getting excited.

The problem will be solved if the person in difficulty can put a 50p piece into a slot. The fuel policy action group can confirm that in some cases, after reconnection of a supply, the meter has been rigged to go at such a speed that the person gets only half what he pays for because he has debts to pay off, so it becomes like a treadmill and the consumer is back to square one.

4.45 pm

There are difficult and complicated methods of paying debts, but none is as effective as the old system under private enterprise. I was a boy before the industry was nationalised. In the poor areas in Sheffield, where I lived, everyone had a slot meter. In many terrace houses not every room had electricity. Often the area board would say to a family, "We think that you can only afford electricity in three rooms." My grandmother did not have electricity upstairs, and in the kitchen she had an old gas lamp, because the area board thought that she would not be able to pay for more electricity. Nobody wants to go back to those days.

The private boards will find, like anyone else, that they will suffer bad debts. In the past the rest of us have paid for the bad debts. The authorities stick 2·5 per cent. on everybody's bill and we all pay. It is like the credit card companies which charge 27 per cent. interest because they have to cover for bad debts. With the nationalised industries, if there is a disconnection at least a Member of Parliament may raise the matter locally and exert pressure, or even ask a question in the House about the increasing number of disconnections. When the gas industry was sold off, disconnections rocketed—the people reading the meters were told to adopt a much tougher line—and exactly the same will happen with electricity. There will be a harder attitude to poor consumers who cannot pay their bills at the end of three months.

The Bill is not good enough. There is no protection for the poor one-parent family who cannot pay when suddenly faced with a bill for three months' electricity. The only protection is to give them the right to demand a "pay as you burn" system, but as yet there is no right for anyone to demand such a meter. I hope that the Minister can tell us that the Bill will include a provision to give that right to poor consumers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before the Minister replies a second time, do any other hon. Members wish to take part in the debate? No.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Later amendments will address themselves specifically to the point which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) has raised. By way of a brief response, there will be a right to ask for prepayment meters if people want them. Far from disconnections going up, they are coming down dramatically. One reason is that people are getting prepayment meters. The hon. Gentleman referred to miscallibration of meters. In those circumstances there can be a direct appeal to the director general.

The hon. Gentleman raised the question of using cash rather than tokens. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) mentioned, one reason for the move to prepayment systems, using tokens or cards, is precisely because they are more secure and cannot be robbed so easily. We will have a debate on the subject, but I can give the hon. Member for Bassetlaw those assurances on the questions that he raised on behalf of poorer consumers.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) is living in the past? The type of prepayment meters now being fitted have a button on them to allow consumers £2 or £5 worth of free electricity which they pay for after the event. That gets over the problem that the hon. Gentleman suggested might arise for consumers.

Mr. Ashton: Will the Minister ask the boards to make that fact clear to the public in advertisements? I assure him that few members of the public know about it.

Mr. Spicer: It becomes a right, and with the latest technology the boards would do well to take the hon. Gentleman's advice and advertise it widely.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) raised the question of liability, and one must ask what sort of consumers he had in mind. If the supply companies had

all the liability imposed on them, that would mean them having total insurance to cover all eventualities, and that would be extremely expensive. It would have to be paid for by other consumers in higher tariffs.

We say that there should be a test or reasonableness. We are making a distinction—that is what the new clause is about—between physical loss which is incurred through a breakdown in supply and which is fully insurable, and unreasonable economic loss—vast losses because of a temporary, perhaps few seconds' disruption of supply. For large computer companies or large companies owning computers—the type of consumer the new clause addresses—it would be surprising if they were not properly insured against such eventualities.

Mr. Barron: Will they be insured?

Mr. Spicer: I cannot speak for every company in the land. It would be surprising, first, if they were not properly insured and, secondly, if they did not have back-up systems, such as small generators, as a standby capacity. Most large computer users and manufacturers would have a standby capacity, and that is the type of company we are considering in this context.

Mr. Barron: What liability do the area boards have at present when eventualities of this type occur? Will companies have to insure differently in the future, or will liability be accepted by the boards?

Mr. Spicer: I will obtain the precise answer for the hon. Gentleman because I do not want to mislead him about the exact liability that the companies will have. We are talking about companies going into the private sector, where the issue of insurance will apply in the way I have described. But I will obtain for the hon. Gentleman the details of the precise status of the obligations and liabilities that are covered at present.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

Conditions for funding certain companies engaged in nuclear generation in Scotland

'.—(1) Without prejudice to section 7(1)(a) above, it may be a condition of a licence granted to a company ("the licence holder") that it shall from time to time provide any company to which subsection (2) below applies with such funds as may be determined by or under the condition in respect of such of that company's liabilities as may be so determined.

(2) This subsection applies to any company which—

(a) is deemed for the purposes of the Companies Act 1985 to be a subsidiary of the licence holder; or

(b) is a related company of the licence holder (as defined in paragraph 92 of Schedule 4 to that Act),

and is, at the time when the condition is imposed, engaged in the operation of a nuclear generating station in Scotland.

(3) Subsection (3) of section 7 above applies in respect of a condition included in a licence by virtue of this section as it applies in respect of a condition so included by virtue of subsection (1)(a) of that section.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 5, 6, 7, 15 and 65.

Mr. Lang: The new clause relates to a technicality in the relationship between Scottish Nuclear Limited and its parent companies. It will enable a licence condition to be included in any licence or licences granted under the Bill requiring the licence holder to meet the liabilities of any subsidiary or related company operating a nuclear generating station in Scotland. The amendment applies only in Scotland, as it is only in Scotland that it is proposed that nuclear operations be conducted through a subsidiary company.

As hon. Members will be aware, it is a central part of the Government's proposals for restructuring the Scottish industry that there should be a separate company. The new clause will enable such a condition to be placed in the licences granted to the two electricity companies as successors to the Scottish boards to ensure that the liabilities of that subsidiary, Scottish Nuclear Limited, are met.

The long-term liabilities in question are those associated with the decommissioning of nuclear installations and the disposal of nuclear waste. Following privatisation, the nuclear stations in Scotland will be owned and operated by SNL, which is to be owned by the two electricity companies in proportion to their relative size.

SNL will be the nuclear site licensee and, as such, will be responsible for decommissioning the stations once generation has ceased. Such decommissioning is planned to take up to 100 years to complete. Financial provision will be made in the balance sheets of SNL and the parent companies against the long-term liabilities. The fact that financial provision is made in this way should ensure that funds are available to meet the long-term liabilities.

The clause covers a technicality which results from the subsidiary structure. As things stand, SNL, as a subsidiary company of the South of Scotland electricity company or a related company to the North of Scotland electricity company, would be unable to obtain funds from its parents without their agreement. While it is expected that the parents would agree, the Government recognise that it is prudent to ensure that there is a direct route to enforce the long-term liabilities against them.

Subsection (1) of the new clause provides for the inclusion of an appropriately drafted licence condition requiring the licence holder to provide such funds as may be determined by, or under the condition in respect of, the liabilities of a company specified in subsection (2). Subsection (2)(a) applies the clause to any company which, in terms of the Companies Act 1985, is a subsidiary of the licence holder; SNL will be a subsidiary of the south company by virtue of the fact that the south company holds more than half its equity share capital. Subsection (2)(b) applies the clause to any company which is a related company of the licence holder, defined in the Companies Act 1985 as meaning any body corporate in which the parent company holds, on a long-term basis, a qualifying capital interest for the purposes of securing a contribution to that company's own activities by the exercise of any control or influence arising from that interest.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister is speaking at a rapid pace about an issue which, in his initial remarks, he implied was merely technical but which is in fact of monumental importance.

He skipped rapidly over the point about SNL having responsibility for including in its accounts the costs of decommissioning any nuclear power stations that are closed. Will he explain precisely the position of Hunterston

[Mr. George Foulkes]

A? The decision to decommission having been made prior to privatisation, will the responsibility for decommissioning that station be inherited by SNL?

Mr. Lang: I said that the new clause was concerned with a technicality because, in essence, it is. The relationship between Scottish Nuclear Limited and its parent companies and the respective roles of the parents and SNL are important and major issues, but the clause is not directly concerned with that. It is concerned with the technical possibility that the parent companies might escape a liability incurred by their subsidiaries. The matter was raised in Committee and I am sure that Opposition Members will welcome this additional provision, which is made in case such a situation should arise.

The nuclear assets of Hunterston A will be transferred to SNL and my expectation—I will seek confirmation of this and if I am wrong I will write to the hon. Gentleman, or if the opportunity arises, correct myself later—is that Hunterston A would also form part of those nuclear assets and be transferred, notwithstanding that the decommissioning process, which may take 100 years, will already be under way.

Mr. Foulkes: The Minister is being helpful and has stated precisely that the nuclear assets of Hunterston A will be transferred to SNL. Do I assume that his reference to "assets" includes liabilities? In other words, may we assume that all aspects of Hunterston A—I am particularly concerned with the major liability of the cost of decommissioning—will be included in the liabilities of SNL and that all of that will be transferred to SNL? Perhaps the Minister has received a note on that by now.

Mr. Lang: I have indeed, and it confirms that I was correct in my assessment in reply to the hon. Gentleman's earlier intervention. Assets and liabilities will be transferred to SNL. The new clause is concerned with a technicality to ensure that the parent companies to SNL cannot escape their contribution to those liabilities. As I said, SNL is related to the north company on the basis described by the Companies Act 1985 from which I have quoted. In both cases, the new clause applies only to a company which, when the condition is imposed, is engaged in the operation of a nuclear generating station in Scotland.

Subsection (3) ensures that clause 7(3), which relates to the role of the director in relation to licence conditions, applies to any condition imposed by virtue of the new clause. The other amendments in the group are technical and I shall say something about them if the House wishes.

5 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): The Minister has described new clause 6 as technical. I recognise that it builds in a safeguard to ensure that the parent company does not slough off some of its responsibilities in the sensitive subject with which the clause deals. However, it raises a number of interesting matters on which we are entitled to inquire, relating to the scale of funds which might be involved and which can be transferred under certain conditions of the licence if new clause 6 reaches the statute book.

There is no area where public interest and sensitivity is more marked than the nuclear subsidiary of the two privatised companies in Scotland. While I imagine that it will be common ground that it is unlikely that any new capacity will be provided and that any nuclear or non-nuclear power stations will be built in Scotland for a considerable time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has pointed out, there are on the horizon very substantial liabilities and charges which will be the subject of some of the financial transfers in the new clause. Perhaps it would be fair for the Minister to provide some details of the exact scale of the transfers, the size of the liabilities and how the nuclear subsidiary will operate.

I do not want to speak at great length about the accumulated debt, but the Minister will have heard the exchanges between my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and the Under-Secretary of State for Energy in the past hour or so. We are all aware of the fact that there is something like £2·7 billion of accumulated debt between the two Scottish boards. I was interested to hear the Under-Secretary of State giving a breakdown of that debt between the national loan fund and more than £1,000 million of foreign debt included in that overall total.

It is important to know as soon as possible exactly what will happen to that debt and how much will be written off as it is a matter of such pressing importance to the electricity industry. I recall the briefing given in December 1988 by Mr. Donald Miller, the chairman of the SSEB at Torness in which he made a statement that I am sure the Minister recalls. He said that the company could not be privatised

"unless the Government writes off a large part of the £2·2 billion debts it incurred in building them."

He was referring to the nuclear power stations.

I heard the Under-Secretary of State making it clear that he was a man of experience with many previous convictions in the privatisation campaign and that he did not think that it was yet time to reveal all, although he promised that sinister happening—a full disclosure—at some point. It is important that the Minister says something on the subject, particularly as I understand that a good deal of the foreign debt is with the European Investment bank. I am relying upon the expertise of some of my colleagues, but I understand that it is backed by Treasury exchange cover and by guarantees.

If I am right, the European Investment bank debt will be at a considerably lower rate of exchange than the going rate. If the European Investment bank debt is transferred to the Treasury before the transfer date, can we be sure that it will be at the same rate of interest and that there will be no disadvantage in terms of the new rates of interest to be charged on the substitute debt, as that will clearly affect the transfer of funds or the call upon those funds which we are discussing in new clause 6? Perhaps the Minister might quickly and simply deal with that when he replies.

Another aspect of that briefing—I almost said that notorious briefing because it was certainly much noticed—at Torness given by Mr. Donald Miller was that he made it clear that he had considerable doubts about the way in which the Government were approaching possible changes in Government policy, the variations in BNFL pricing policy and the impact that that could have on the balance sheet of the privatised companies. That will have a direct effect on new clause 6 and upon the calls on the parent company which it covers.

The House will be familiar with the fact that in the financial year 1987-88 the South of Scotland electricity board had a trading profit of £13 million which was dramatically transferred into a loss of £70 million simply because of the cost of transferring the Chapelcross power station—a very old, minor power station—to the Cumbria board. Of course a great deal will emerge about future possible transactions which must affect the extent to which new clause 6 is used and whether it is necessary at all and are therefore relevant to the debate.

The House will recall that the chairman of the SSEB made it very clear in December 1988 that in his view the company would be, "unsellable" unless he received "the ultimate insurance" on the possible costs and the escalating expense of decommissioning. He said that the assurances

"will have to besigned and sealed before one writes a prospectus—otherwise it will not be worth writing."

That was a very serious point to be made by someone who was about to become chairman of a private company approaching flotation.

It is clear that the solution to that problem will have a very far-reaching effect on the use that is made of new clause 6. I hope that the Minister will say something about that. A favourite jargon term often found in European debates is "transparency". I am in favour of transparency and knowing a little more about how the machinery will operate and what the implications will be. I say that in the light of what Mr. Miller said. I draw the Minister's attention to a story which appeared in *The Scotsman* on 8 March 1989 under the headline:

"Nuclear costs deal eases SSEB's sell-off doubts".

It went on:

"A secret agreement has been reached between Ministers and the South of Scotland Electricity Board which has removed one of the biggest question marks over the proposed privatisation of the Scottish power industry."

I cannot think of anything that will have a more direct effect upon the operation of new clause 6, and the amount of funding that will have to come from parent companies. We have an excellent opportunity relevant to the debate to get some information about that secret deal. It is particularly appropriate that the Minister of State should be at the Dispatch Box. It appears that he was the principal partner, together with Mr. Donald Miller, in the private discussions that the press tell us led to the deal.

The article says:

"Both the SSEB and the Scottish Office yesterday confirmed however, that an understanding has been reached in which Mr. Miller's doubts have been satisfied . . . the key element is understood to be assurances on the contracts which fix ceiling levels on the amount of any unforeseen rise in nuclear costs and in the contracts which will govern the relationship after privatisation with British Nuclear Fuels Limited."

It goes on to say:

"A senior Scottish Office source"—

I am always suspicious when I read those words. However, that senior Scottish Office figure said that there was

"still some way to go in the discussions before a firm announcement could be made but that the process involved 'dotting the Is and crossing the Ts.'"

I should like to hear from the Minister a little about the deal and what has happened. Clearly, it will have an important and direct impact upon the way in which new clause 6 will operate.

A particularly good example of the calls that may be made on new clause 6 is the issue to which my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley referred in his intervention—the decommissioning of Hunterston A Magnox station. I do not want to debate the merits of that decision because it would be going wide of the new clause. However, we are entitled to ask for some information about the implications of the decision in terms of the calls that may be made on the parent company under the licence agreements that will presumably be written in if the new clause is placed on the statute book.

I do not know what the cost will be but an article dated 30 March 1989 in *Power in Europe*, which is published by the *Financial Times* and is a reputable and informed trade paper, points out:

"Hunterston A is the most efficient of the United Kingdom's Magnox stations, and is one of the most efficient nuclear units in the world, with a lifetime load factor of 82 per cent."

It goes on to point out:

"only minimum expenditure is expected to be required at Hunterston A in order to receive the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate's approval for continued operation in the 1990s."

There is little dispute about that as the background to what has now happened.

The view of the author of that article is particularly relevant and interesting in terms of new clause 6. He believes that the real reason for the closure is that the operating costs of all Magnox stations in the United Kingdom have increased markedly in recent years, particularly because of higher BNFL charges for the reprocessing of spent fuel. If that is so, and the arrangements between BNFL and the privatised companies continue unaltered, the implications for the transfer of funds to the nuclear subsidiary company, which are envisaged in the new clause, are bound to be significant.

Mr. Foulkes: I agree with my hon. Friend's suspicions about the words, "senior Scottish Office sources". When one reads the words, "senior Labour MP" one knows that if someone is quoted in that way, one is about to be stabbed in the back—*[Interruption.]* Well, anyone would give their name if they had something good to say.

My hon. Friend mentioned BNFL and its costs to the SSEB in relation to Hunterston A. BNFL has a private monopoly on the ability to provide reprocessing. Does that not illustrate beautifully the way in which the private monopolies, which have total control over the costs they charge, can have a grip on the consumer? That is the way the privatised electricity companies will have a grip on the consumer in relation to pricing.

Mr. Dewar: That is a fair comment. I do not want to follow my hon. Friend down that line but there are dangers and concerns. My hon. Friend's health seems to be remarkably good in view of the dangers he described of life in Parliament.

Mr. Foulkes: I was thinking about my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

Mr. Dewar: As always, I am touched.

I shall return to the thread of my argument. I was making an important point. It is an open secret and was the subject of specific comment when the Select Committee on Energy considered the matter. Evidence was given by Mr. Christopher Harding, chairman of BNFL. According to the article in *Power in Europe* he told the Select Committee that the "contract was unbreakable". That is the contract between the nuclear subsidiary whose fate we are discussing and BNFL. He said:

[Mr. Dewar]

"the contract was unbreakable; should the two utilities attempt to avoid reprocessing by long-term storage, for example, they would be obliged to pay BNFL the price of reprocessing anyway. It is, in effect, one of the biggest take-or-pay contracts in history."

Clearly, that will have a direct influence on what we are discussing now.

5.15 pm

I am entitled to ask the Minister if he can say whether that contract, in that remarkably inflexible state—almost a Leonine bargain—is still in place. If it is, the House should consider it in relation to the calls that are likely to be made under new clause 6.

Another point worth mentioning is that we are talking about the calls on funds to supply the nuclear subsidiary. No doubt nuclear expenditure will be linked to other types of generation and its availability. I do not want to transgress on your tolerance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is important that the Minister mentions the SSEB's arrangements on coal burn. I say that because the state of coal burn and whether the agreement that has been negotiated over many years has been brought to a successful conclusion will inevitably affect the calls made under the new clause.

I do not want to strike a discordant note and I welcome the fact that the Minister intervened in the long-running negotiations and recognised that public interest was involved. However, I was saddened that we had to beat on his door for a couple of years without success and that an enormous amount of damage was done as a result of the delay and the Minister's refusal to do his duty.

We know that in principle an agreement for five years has been reached. Under the agreement the SSEB will take 2 million tonnes of coal a year. However, I understand that the last two years of the agreement are dependent on the use of the interconnector. That is a matter for speculation and concern. We do not know much about the details or whether Ministers are still completely satisfied that the deal will hold at this point. The Minister may wish to correct me and I would be glad to receive any details but there is nothing clear about the price. We have heard mention of 150p per gigajoule but we were told by the SSEB that it would have to receive 130p per gigajoule if it were to sell effectively into the interconnector. British Coal is said to be holding out for 180p per gigajoule.

Those are enormous variations. I unreservedly welcome the agreement in principle but I am concerned about the current state of play. I would be interested to know how much of the two million tonnes will be deep mined and how much will be opencast or whether there is any agreement on that. Those are all matters which, inevitably, affect the nuclear subsidiary and, therefore, the calls on the parent company's financial resources which may be made under new clause 6.

Another point, which is connected by the same logic to this debate, is what is happening about the interconnector. I raise this matter because I now read repeatedly in articles by well-informed journalists a suggestion that any sales by the Scottish private boards to the English distribution companies will come from nuclear base load electricity. The logic is that that is likely to find favour in the first-call system and may be more attractive and cheaper for clients south of the border. There is a real fear that the consumer will have to pay a price for that and that domestic costs will spiral. It is important for the Minister to say a few words about that. I am anxious to see the interconnector working and sales increasing, which might do something to reduce the calls on the parent companies' finances under the mechanism envisaged in new clause 6. We are entitled to some information from the Minister on those points.

I am conscious of the fact that several of my hon. Friends wish to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am also aware that there will be another debate on Scottish matters when we come to the next group of amendments, which are concerned with the regulatory machinery. I give fair notice to the Minister that we shall raise such matters as the 8 per cent. increase in prices. I hoped that such rises could have been prevented under a proper regulatory system. The electricity consultative councils have been left bravely, but vainly, trying to hold the line for the consumer interest in the dying days of this Government's stewardship. However, we shall be discussing that in our later debate and I do not wish to transgress at present.

I ask the Minister to address some of the important points. If he is asking us to endorse new clause 6, he cannot do so on the basis that it is simply a technical matter to be nodded onto the statute book in a perfunctory manner. He must give us some idea of the shape and scale of the calls likely to be made under the new machinery and he must try to deal with the important points I have raised, not because of a peculiar and idiosyncratic interest of my own, but because they are of fundamental importance to the industry and the consumer.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): It was interesting that the Minister tried to pass off new clause 6 as a technicality, when the very fact that it is necessary suggests that there is a rather more deep-seated problem, which has been touched on already by hon. Members and about which the Minister must come clean. The Minister has said, in effect, that the successor companies to the existing boards in Scotland will, under the Bill, inherit a liability—the requirement to own any nuclear subsidiary to which they are committed to provide funding, on a fairly open-ended basis. That means that the commercial judgment of the successor companies will be compromised by new clause 6. They would have some reason, if they are coming in with a fresh approach, to believe that the SSEB in particular has a record of profligate extravagance. It would not have been able to get away with such extravagance if it had been in the private sector.

The SSEB has been able to invest in providing 110 per cent. excess capacity in the Scottish generating system, which is way above any possible strategic or commercial requirement. That has been brought home in the past couple of weeks, as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) remarked, by the announcement that the board is closing Hunterston A, the most efficient and consistently successful Magnox station, which still has a substantial effective life left. It is to be closed down for one reason—that the board cannot find, or foresee the possibility of finding, a market for the electricity that it produces.

That seems extraordinary, given that in the past couple of years a brand new nuclear power station has been opened on the other coast of Scotland. For a company to build a new power station and then to close down a smaller power station of a similar type and of proven efficiency suggests a complete lack of good commercial judgment

and an incredible degree of appalling forecasting. One must also consider that the massive Peterhead power station is operating consistently under capacity and the Inverkip was mothballed almost before it came on stream.

It is no wonder that the Scottish electricity industry is apprehensive about being exposed to market forces—if that were the Government's intention. It is not, and new clause 6 is a further indication of how ridiculous the Government's policy is on nuclear power and the operation of the market. It is, perhaps, appropriate to quote from *Energy Economics*, which, summarising Government policy on nuclear power, said:

"Privatisation has meant that the UK has discovered it does not after all need an active fast breeder research programme, nor pour vast sums into nuclear fusion; that nuclear power is not as economic as viable alternatives; that reprocessing is an expensive waste of time; that decommissioning is a vast problem."

That is the state of the nuclear industry, and all those factors specifically affect the industry in Scotland.

Consumers may ask how much cheaper electricity in Scotland might have been had we had an efficient electricity board producing close to the required capacity, rather than servicing the debt for a massive over-capacity. The Bill has already provided the SSEB with a £2·5 billion nuclear debt write-off. Mr. Donald Miller has said that that is not enough. Presumably, this "technical amendment" is designed to ensure that not only will the taxpayer have to contribute to the massive excess of nuclear capacity in Scotland, but that the consumer will continue thereafter to fund it through electricity prices.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) made passing reference to the recent increase of 8·5 per cent. It is interesting to make the point that that increase is higher than that in England and Wales and higher than the rate of inflation—at least for this week, although inflation will no doubt catch up fairly soon. The point which has not been fully realised is that Scotland is now beginning the fairly rapid march from being the area of the United Kingdom that has enjoyed the cheapest electricity to being the area of the United Kingdom that will face the most expensive electricity as a direct result of this Bill. The electricity boards, while still in public ownership, are like the Welsh forwards, getting in their retaliation first. They are softening up the Scottish public to the idea that price increases in Scotland will move faster than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Robert Maclennan: (Caithness and Sutherland): Can my hon. Friend explain the relationship between his earlier remarks about the over-investment by the SSEB in the nuclear industry and the fact that Scotland, as he has rightly described, has enjoyed much cheaper electricity than our neighbours south of the border?

Mr. Bruce: The answer to that is that Scotland has had the advantage of access to hydro power. I made the point on Hunterston A about the success of the SSEB's engineering capability compared to that of the Central Electricity Generating Board. I acknowledge freely that the SSEB has been more successful technically than the CEGB in the development of nuclear power. However, I repeat that there was no justification for building Torness. If that money had not been invested, we would not have had to close Hunterston A and electricity prices in Scotland could have been even lower than we have enjoyed. There is a combination of factors and I freely accept that the earlier efficiency of the nuclear industry, coupled with hydro prices, are the main explanation.

5.30 pm

However, having reached that position, the way forward that the SSEB is now pursuing should be questioned. I suggested in Committee that the Scottish electricity boards should at least consider selling Torness to an English user, lock stock and barrel—in other words, transfer the capacity. I accept that that is a contentious statement and that the South of Scotland electricity board is hardly likely to be keen on selling something of which it feels so technically proud. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will recognise that it is legitimate to ask why we are closing an economic and apparently safe nuclear power station only two years after opening a new one. Surely the argument must be that we should never have built Torness in the first place but, having built it, might it not have been more sensible to have tried to sell Hunterston A so that its capacity could be used——

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): We are well aware that the hon. Gentleman made this point earlier in Committee. Indeed, I referred to it in Committee when, unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman had briefly left the Committee room. If we sell off Torness to the English market so that it provides low-base, low-cost electricity to England, where will we in Scotland find a market for exporting our still-excess electricity?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. We have massive excess capacity in Scotland for which the South of Scotland electricity board has admitted that it will not be able to find a market. Having invested in that capacity, hon. Members should address the way in which we can ensure, that it is used to the maximum benefit for both the Scottish consumer and the British taxpayer. Closing a station does not seem to give the maximum benefit for the money invested.

I accept that having reached our present position—I do not think that we should have got here—we are left with the problem of excess capacity. All that I am suggesting is that that course of action should be examined because there is no possibility of securing the future of the coal industry in Scotland, about which the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) is so legitimately concerned, if we have massive excess capacity. If Torness turns out to be the SSEB's cheapest investment, the SSEB might argue left to its own devices, that having made that investment, it might well choose to close the coal capacity and substitute Torness. There is therefore an argument that taking Torness out of the equation would help to create the balance that would ensure the coal industry's future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not pursue that point too far because we are going further and further away from the substance of new clause 6.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to you for putting me on the right track, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, I hope that you will accept that costs relating to the continuing nuclear power industry are relevant to this new clause because the way in which those costs can be absorbed so as not to disadvantage the Scottish consumer is a point of real interest. The Government's new clause gives me cause for concern, because it means that, regardless of the

[Mr. Bruce]

commercial judgment of the successor companies, Scottish consumers will have to pay more and more towards the cost of servicing that excess capacity. That will be particularly true if we fail to find a market for it and I have not met many people who have confidence that we shall secure such a market.

It seems extraordinary that we should continue to fund the nuclear industry in Scotland and close a nuclear power station at a time when the Central Electricity Generating Board is applying for planning permission to build up to four more nuclear power stations. If there is a requirement for nuclear capacity to meet the non-fossil fuel argument —leaving aside the merits and demerits of that argument —surely the sensible thing is to ensure that before we build new power stations we organise the existing capacity to ensure that it is fully utilised. To close power stations——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may be pre-empting a debate that is yet to come.

Mr. Bruce: I accept that constraint, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and shall be happy to raise the matter later in the debate.

When the Minister replies I hope that he will have taken on board the fact that suggesting that this is a technical amendment is not good enough. The question that the Minister must answer is, if the nuclear subsidiary is to receive, as of right, funding from its parent companies, which is what they will be post-privatisation, will that funding simply be the transfer of funds provided by the taxpayer through the provisions of what will then be the Electricity Act, or will they be funds over and above those funds, which can then be recovered from the consumer in the form of increased prices?

The Minister must accept that two sources of funds are provided for. One is the ability of the industry to raise revenue and the other is the up to £6 billion that has been provided from taxpayers towards the cost of what is the substantially nuclear debt of writing off the nuclear decommissioning costs.

In response to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, the Minister has already suggested that decommissioning is included in the provision of Hunterston A. If that is the case, we are entitled to know how much of that cost will be met by the taxpayer and how much will be borne by Scottish consumers. If that is not made clear, the new clause will seem to be about securing additional charges on the Scottish consumer towards the cost of the nuclear industry on top of what the taxpayer will have to invest. That might put a rather different complexion on the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that the early investment in nuclear power may well have been beneficial to the consumer but from now on the Scottish consumer may find that he is paying through the nose. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us exactly what the new clause means in that context.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I am not as blasé about the cost structure of nuclear power or about its great advantages as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). As you rightly said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is room for a debate so that we can get all the facts, figures and consequences of that. I repeat that I am not blasé about the great benefits——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Nor am I.

Mr. Eadie: Well, the hon. Gentleman appeared to be blasé in his speech. However, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pointed out, the hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity later.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said, the new clause affords us the opportunity to talk about the question of commercial judgment. Taxpayers' money is involved and we want some guidance and explanation from the Minister. When we are talking about commercial judgment we have great difficulty in even getting the Minister or his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to come to the Dispatch Box to explain what is happening on coal burn in Scotland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden said that he thought that this debate would give the Minister the opportunity to give some information to the House about what is happening on the so-called agreement or understanding reached between the South of Scotland electricity board and British Coal. There can be no argument about it: the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends are responsible for the South of Scotland electricity board and for all the costs that are likely to be involved and, as my hon. Friend pointed out, billions rather than millions of pounds are involved in relation to SSEB debt. Commercial judgment must enter discussions about coal burn.

The Standing Orders would not permit me to go into all the details and arguments in favour of a greater coal industry in proportion to the nuclear power industry in Scotland. I hope that the Minister will not try to argue that nuclear power is much cheaper than coal. We have the figures: that argument is finished. It is now recognised that nuclear power is more expensive than coal. The Minister will probably argue that there are good, sound environmental reasons for nuclear power. We will later have an opportunity to challenge that argument.

Opposition Members are trying to extract from the Minister some information about what is happening to the coal burn agreement. He cannot stand back and say that it is a matter for commercial judgment, then put down a new clause involving not millions but billions of pounds, and ask the House to agree. We are entitled to an explanation. What is the agreement? How many millions of tonnes of coal are involved for the Scottish coal industry? As my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden said, we want also to know what it involves in respect of opencast and deep mining.

I have a vested interest in the matter. There are two pits in my constituency. I hear of all the financial problems of the SSEB. A press release by British Coal states that it will not be 3·5 million tonnes and that it may be 2 million tonnes of coal. We want to know how much will be opencast and how much will be deep mined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that he will not go too far down that road. The new clause specifically deals with funding relating to nuclear power stations.

Mr. Eadie: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, as we are talking about moneys, and as the Scottish Office talked about exercising commercial judgment, Opposition Members have a right to challenge the Government's commercial judgment in introducing this new clause which, by implication, means that they will

be responsible for solving the SSEB's debt to the extent of billions of pounds. We were told that there were problems with the financing of British Coal, so we are entitled to question the Minister on how he can reconcile the commercial jugdments that he talked about with his proposal to solve the SSEB's debt to the extent of several billions of pounds.

The Secretary of State for Energy has been more forthcoming than the Scottish Office Minister. I give due credit to the right hon. Gentleman. He tried to be helpful, but I cannot say that about the Minister who is to reply to the debate. Like a parrot, he repeated that it is a matter for commercial judgment. As moneys are involved and as we are talking about commercial judgment and the commercial viability of the SSEB, we are entitled to hear the Minister explain the implications.

I should love to debate the matter in greater detail, but I do not want to stray too far. We are talking about moneys and the deep-mine coal industry and their implications in relation to the debt. I hope that the Minister will let us know what the coal burn really is and what the present stage of the negotiations is. He cannot say that he does not know. He has been in close contact with it and has said that he is responsible for the SSEB. He must know what is happening. The Minister's reply will be closely scrutinised by my hon. Friends. In deference to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I leave it at that, but we want information, and information we must get this evening.

Mr. Foulkes: I am not too sure how knowledgeable you are about the geography of Scotland, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but in case you are not fully aware, the Minister——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I inform the hon. Gentleman that I spent 18 months at royal naval air station Abbotsinch, HMS Sanderling at the end of the war.

5.45 pm

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful for that information, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be fully aware that the Minister, the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang), represents a constituency which is contiguous with mine, Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley. The name of his constituency is almost as unwieldy as mine, but his constituency is equally as beautiful. We know him well, not only in the House but in the south-west of Scotland. When we think about the Minister, the two words that most commonly reach our lips are——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Small majority.

Mr. Foulkes: No, not "small majority" but "smooth" and "bland". I am sure that you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Minister was very smooth and particularly bland in introducing the amendment in his usual low voice, quickly glossing over what he described as technicalities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and I said, and as even the proportionally represented hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) agreed—that is quite a spectrum of opinion to start with—the amendment has some substantial implications, and I wish to ask a few questions about them.

First, as the Minister said, the prime purpose is to ensure that the parent company cannot escape the liabilities of the subsidiary. But what about the other way round? I hope that the Minister will answer that question. New clause 6 seems to demonstrate that some aspects of the licence conditions are not intended to apply to subsidiary companies. For example, apart from generation and supply, licence conditions could be avoided by using a subsidiary company to perform certain tasks. I hope that the Minister will check that. If that were to be the case, it would be a worrying loophole, and I hope that the Minister will consider doing something about it. If there is no loophole, I hope that he will give an assurance to that effect.

Mr. Lang: I shall deal with that specific point now in a way which I hope will reassure the hon. Gentleman. If he reads the new clause, he will find that it is concerned solely with the activities of nuclear generating companies.

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful for the Minister's intervention, but I am not totally reassured by it. There are still activities in which nuclear generating companies will be involved. By allocating tasks to a subsidiary company, the supply and generating companies could avoid their legal liability.

That is not a party political point. Therefore, it is in the public interest for hon. Members to be assured that the provision is watertight. I hope that the Minister will consider that.

Secondly, nuclear costs are a major matter. There is still uncertainty about nuclear debt, and there are provisions for write-off. We are suspicious about the position in Scotland. The huge, almost entirely nuclear, debt in Scotland of £2·7 billion is almost exactly the equivalent of what the Government might expect to get from the floatation of the companies. Therefore, there is a major incentive for the Government to use taxpayers' money to write off the debt. As usual in respect of privatisations, we are concerned about that matter. It is an abuse of taxpayers' money.

Opposition Members are concerned also about the other costs which, in the past and even at present, have been greatly underestimated. I refer to the two additional nuclear costs. One is the disposal of the waste and the second is the decommissioning of the power stations which are vital and central to the amendment.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) has a particular constituency interest in the closure of Hunterston A and I will in no way trespass on his responsibility. I know that he is deeply concerned about employment in his constituency and the implications of its proposed closure. Some of my constituents work at Hunterston, so I share his concern. However, I have been suspicious about the entire episode. I shall use the phrase of the singer Max Bygraves, "I wanna tell you a story", about Hunterston A.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will my hon. Friend sing it?

Mr. Foulkes: No, I certainly will not sing it. That would empty the Chamber even further.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North, as I do, receives weekly reports from the South of Scotland electricity board about the operation of Hunterston A and Hunterston B. Those reports tell us who is visiting, who has had slide shows, and what incidents there have been. I must confess that they are scrupulous in defining and giving information about

[Mr. Foulkes]

incidents that have taken place. Those weekly reports were telling the success story of Hunterston A—how well it was doing, how efficient and marvellous it was, and what a long-term future it had. Then suddenly there was an announcement that the SSEB was to close it.

I waited then with anticipation for the next weekly report from the SSEB. Of course, it was a model of careful writing and one had to read between the lines to get to the truth. It was probably written by my old friend Tom James. Clearly, the stated reason for the closure of Hunterston A had nothing to do with the real reason, which is why I intervened earlier.

I accept completely and unreservedly the Minister's assurance that it is now the Government's intention to say that the costs of the decommissioning of Hunterston A must be taken on by Scottish Nuclear Limited. However, I also know Donald Miller. I have known him over the years as deputy chairman and as chairman. I know his persuasive power and the way he keeps on going. As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) said, he is like a tiger on the question of the coal contract with British Coal.

I have discussed with Donald Miller, too, the cost of decommissioning. He said that he believes that the cost of decommissioning is finite, it can be calculated, and that he has made an allowance for it. I confidently predict that he has it wrong. He has underestimated and the cost will be much greater. There has not been a full decommissioning of a Magnox power station in this country or elsewhere, and it must still be decided whether it will be dismantled piece by piece, whether it will be encased in concrete, or what will happen. All the options must be considered.

The cost of dealing with that decommissioning is a major problem. I predict that pressure will be put on the Government to get the taxpayer to take on board some, if not all, of the cost of decommissioning and other costs, too. I hope that the Government will stick to their guns and that it will not be the taxpayer who takes on that responsibility. As privatisation approaches and the Government realise the real cost, they will become increasingly worried about the burden around the necks of the companies soon to be privatised. The only explanation that I can envisage for the early closure of Hunterston A is that the Government are looking for some way of getting that debt taken on by the taxpayer and not taken on by the future private company.

My second point concerns the site at Chapeldonan in my constituency, which is a designated site that has been owned by the SSEB for more than a decade. The SSEB has said that it will build a nuclear power station there. It is a blight on the area around Girvan. At Girvan the development of the town is constrained on the west side by the sea and on the south and east sides by hills. The only place where housing and industry can be developed is to the north, but that site is owned by the SSEB and has been reserved for a nuclear power station. Over the past few years, Kyle and Carrick district council and myself as the local Member of Parliament——

Mr. Home Robertson: And Councillor Struan Stevenson.

Mr. Foulkes: As my hon. Friend said, Councillor Struan Stevenson, the ex-leader of the Conservative group on Kyle and Carrick district council, as well as the Labour councillors, have been anxious to get the SSEB to declare Chapeldonan surplus to requirements. It will not need another nuclear power station. The hon. Member for Gordon and my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) know that Torness power station was not needed and that it provided capacity well in excess of demand. It will certainly not need Chapeldonan.

What I do not understand from the new clause is who will take over the ownership of the Chapeldonan site if it is not sold before privatisation. Will it be the SSEB, the new privatised company, or will it be its subsidiary? *[Interruption.]* The more my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) waves his finger, the longer I will take, because it distracts me. Or will ownership be taken over by Scottish Nuclear Limited?

That is an important issue and that is the reason why I wrote to Donald Miller at the SSEB saying that the only advantage of privatisation—it sticks in my gullet a little to say this—is that it has made the people who are generating and will generate power look seriously at the costs. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian has said that nuclear power is not cheap, as the Government previously pretended—it is more expensive—and they have now realised that. I hope that we shall reach the stage when the SSEB will say that the Chapeldonan site is no longer required and that it can be sold and used for much needed industry and housing developments in the Girvan area.

My fourth and penultimate point——

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend has missed the third point.

Mr. Foulkes: My third point was Chapeldonan. If my hon. Friend were able to count, I am sure that he would know that.

My fourth point is that Chapelcross near Annan is an anomaly. The Minister said that the legislation applies to power generation in Scotland, but in Chapelcross there will be the anomaly of a nuclear power station based in Scotland, but providing electricity for an electricity supply company based in England. I am not sure how the provisions of the new clause and some of the other Scottish provisions in the Bill will apply to that situation. Will they apply to the siting of the establishment or the siting of the company that owns and operates that establishment? The question of cross-border relationships is an important one.

What is interesting is that the SSEB suddenly decides to close Hunterston and that British Nuclear Fuels plc decides to replace Chapelcross. One begins to suspect in those circumstances that many strange things are going on and that other factors are involved, as I have already shown in the case of Hunterston. It is also interesting to consider the other factors relating to Chapelcross, such as the pressures arising from the requirement for the supply of plutonium for weapons as opposed to power generation. Tritium is also provided at the related plant at Chapelcross and there is intense pressure on Chapelcross because of America's shortage of tritium and the relative shortage of plutonium.

Those of us who live in the south-west of Scotland are a bit fed up as we are becoming surrounded by nuclear establishments which are of no benefit to the local inhabitants, including the Minister of State, who lives not far from me. Those establishments are creating additional hazards and problems for us.

6 pm

I am concerned about the Bill in general. I appreciate that the new clause is a belated attempt by the Government to patch up some of the difficulties, but it creates further difficulties. Today I have highlighted my suspicions and worries. I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity of this important debate to try to answer some of our concerns; otherwise we shall seek more occasions in the next few days, weeks and months to pursue our concerns until we get the answers, which are especially needed by the people of south-west Scotland.

Mr. Home Robertson: I share the views expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) about the tough practices of the present chairman of the South of Scotland electricity board. Some might say that the chairman has used sharp practices to manage that board. It is tempting to consider that a privatised SSEB could not possibly behave as badly as the present board. One could cite a number of examples of such behaviour, such as the way in which the board has handled the coal contract. In my constituency we have the bizarre situation in which large quantities of coal, which have been shipped halfway around the world from China, are being burnt at Cockenzie power station when the necessary coal to feed the grid could easily be mined from the Scottish coalfields.

I wonder whether the nuclear subsidiaries will enjoy the same facilities as the present SSEB and get a year's holiday from the rates? The Minister will be aware of my correspondence with him about how the SSEB has managed to take advantage of the rather curious provisions dealing with the rating of public utilities. On 25 May 1988 in one of the famous press releases to which my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley has drawn attention, the SSEB claimed credit for contributing electricity to the grid from Torness in my constituency. In July 1988 it confirmed that it was putting 682 MW into the national grid. On 1 October 1988, however, the SSEB signed a certificate and submitted it to the assessor of public utilities in Scotland to say that it was generating nil at Torness, and hey presto—that ensured that it avoided paying more than £1 million in rates for the coming year. That is one way to fix the books in preparation for the privatised regime.

Much has been said about the fact that Scotland has a substantial excess of generating capacity over its peak demand and it is relevant to understand the background to that. I am acutely aware of that extra capacity because it has arisen since the construction of Torness nuclear power station in my constituency. When the decision was taken to go ahead with the construction of that nuclear power station there were many predictions of increased demand for electricity. There was also a general acceptance of the bland assurances given over the years that nothing could go wrong at nuclear power stations. Since then, one or two accidents have raised doubts about their safety record. Of greater significance to this debate is our experience of 10 years of a Government who have run down British industry and reduced the demand for energy despite the fact that we have the capacity to produce energy efficiently in Scotland.

A graphic example of the rundown of industry was the closure of the Invergordon aluminium smelter. I understand that we now import more aluminium than Invergordon could ever have produced, but in allowing that smelter to close down the Government wrote off one part of the Hunterston power station. That is a curious way to manage our economy and our long-term energy policy.

Nuclear installations function in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) and there is widespread public concern that those power stations must be run efficiently and safely. That concern will run through this debate.

Much has been said about the cost of decommissioning nuclear power stations, but we should also consider the obvious additional costs of running nuclear power stations to the high standards to which it is imperative that they keep if we are to avoid the sort of accidents that have occurred abroad and, indeed, in Britain. Apart from the ongoing cost of running a power station and the cost of decommissioning such a station, there is also the cost of insuring against accidents at nuclear power stations.

Perhaps the Minister will say what provision has been made for insuring the operators of nuclear power stations in Scotland against the consequences of accidents, large or small. Will the parent company or the subsidiary company be able to indemnify people who may be affected by the emission of radioactive material or as a result of a serious accident at a nuclear power station? The House will not be surprised to discover that that is a matter of considerable concern to my constituents in the Torness area following what happened at Windscale in 1957, at Three Mile Island and, more recently, at Chernobyl. Things can go wrong and massive disruption and massive costs can result.

It would be useful if the Minister could tell us how the operators of the nuclear power stations under the new regime will be able to ensure that such costs can be met in all circumstances. Will the Government insist that the operators idemnify the people affected?

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): In the light of all that we now know about the development of the Torness power station, does the hon. Gentleman regret his original support for the project?

Mr. Home Robertson: Frankly, yes. In recent years I have put that on record several times. At the time when the decision was taken to construct Torness nuclear power station, there was increasing demand for electricity, there were credible forecasts of a need for a new generating capacity in Scotland and evidence was not publicly available, as it is now, of the possibility of serious accidents. Be that as it may, however, Torness nuclear power station has been built and commissioned and it would be absurd to try to turn the clock back now.

The people of East Lothian, Cunninghame, where Hunterston is located, and throughout Scotland are fighting to ensure that in the future the generating plants are operated safely to the highest possible standards. We must also ensure that we have the right economic climate to enable us to take advantage of the power potential in Scotland, whether that means the oil industry, the coal industry, hydro-electric power or nuclear power. Scotland has the capacity to be the power house not only for its own economy, but for the entire United Kingdom. What we require from the Government is the framework to make that possible.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will there be a statement about Sir Leon Brittan who, when interviewed for

[Mr. David Winnick]

television, stated that the then Solicitor-General's letter was leaked on the express approval and authority of the Prime Minister's private secretary and press secretary, Mr. Bernard Ingham? There seems to be a contradiction between what the Prime Minister told the House and what Sir Leon Brittan has said on record. The integrity of the Prime Minister is at stake——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has gone far enough. I have heard of no request for permission to make a statement to the House on that or any other matter.

Mr. Wilson: I should have been quite happy for my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) to proceed. I am sure that it would be gratifying for all Opposition Members if, at last, the chickens were coming home to roost for the Prime Minister's men. As far as the Prime Minister's Scottish men are concerned, once again we are having an important Scottish debate without the presence of one solitary Scottish Tory Member other than the Minister.

I do not wish to extend this debate long as it has already continued for longer than most of us expected. Although I am speaking from the Dispatch Box, the point that I wish to dwell on, while highly relevant to the new clause, relates particularly to a constituency issue of my own, to which reference has frequently been made in the debate—the proposed closure of Hunterston A nuclear power station in my constituency.

It is worth noting that the SSEB, in framing its announcement, was careful to talk of the "possible" closure of Hunterston A nuclear station, which is of the Magnox design and has been in operation for the past 25 years. I cannot help feeling—particularly when I look at the new clause—that Hunterston A and, by definition, the people who work there are caught up in a fairly high-powered game of poker in which the stakes played for are intricately involved with the privatisation of the electricity industry and what is to be done with the nuclear content. That is objectionable. The record of Hunterston A is second to none—it is the most efficient of the United Kingdom's Magnox stations. The record of its work force is also second to none, having given extremely loyal and diligent service for the past 25 years. I recently visited the Hunterston A station and was given absolutely no clue of any proposal to close it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) was absolutely right—the announcement was completely unexpected. I believe, as does the work force, that the station is but a pawn in the privatisation game, the outcome of which is not yet known. The real reason for Hunterston's closure, we are led to believe, is the increase in its operating costs, due particularly to British Nuclear Fuels' imposition of higher charges for the reprocessing of spent fuel.

6.15 pm

The Minister, in his bland way, said that this was a technical matter and had nothing to do with the substance of electricity privatisation, but he has an obligation to say what considerations will be involved in the technical announcement contained in the new clause. The financial sums involved are truly enormous. The decommissioning of Hunterston A will probably cost about £250 million to £300 million. Despite the questions that have been posed and partially answered in this debate, I still want a clear-cut statement from the Minister when he sums up about who will carry the costs of the decommissioning and about the relationship between the timing of the announcement of the possible closure of Hunterston A and the passage of the Bill through the House.

The logical consequences of the position of Hunterston A go far beyond that station and my constituency. As we understand it, the SSEB's concern, as a result of the high costs being charged by BNFL, is not primarily with Hunterston A but with the two advanced gas-cooled reactor stations, Hunterston B and Torness. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) pointed out, it appears from the evidence given to the Select Committee on Energy that the SSEB and its successor may be tied to a contract with BNFL which would impose exactly the same cost disadvantages on Hunterston B and Torness as those which led to the threatened premature closure of Hunterston A.

The Minister must say, within the context of new clause 6, whether the costs of decommissioning Hunterston B and Torness on account of a high-cost regime operated by BNFL can also be expected. He should say whether the story in *The Scotsman* of 8 March was founded in fact. Under an exclusive label, Chris McLaughlin reported that the tentative agreement reached between the SSEB and the Scottish Office was partly based on a review of the contracts that will govern the future relationship, after privatisation, with British Nuclear Fuels plc. Has a deal been made between the Government and BNFL on the relationship between the SSEB's successor and that company or is it possible, as predicted in the "Power in Europe" article published in the *Financial Times*, that continuing cost burdens will be imposed on Hunterston B and Torness in the form of high charges imposed by BNFL?

The Minister has a good opportunity today to take this matter out of the realms of journalistic theorising, leaked exclusives or the word of a "senior Scottish Office source" and give the House a definitive statement about the position. I need hardly say that the future of Hunterston B power station is of immense importance. It is of even greater importance to my constituency and that part of Scotland than Hunterston A, which may close within the next few years. As the Minister said earlier, we are talking about a decommissioning process which will continue for at least 100 years—150 years has been suggested to me as the time scale involved before the core reactor can be removed from the Hunterston A site. We are talking about a time far into the future, and about continuing costs and implications for the communities around Hunterston A.

I was surprised and disappointed that the announcement of this possible prospective closure should have come so unexpectedly, without rehearsal and with minimal notice to the work force and, so far, with so little information about the implications being given to the communities around Hunterston A. I want the relevant questions to be answered tonight. It is not good enough for the Minister to say that this is merely a technical clause. It carries on its back substantial financial and practical implications for Hunterston A in my constituency, for nuclear generation in Scotland and for electrical generation throughout Scotland. The Minister should take this opportunity to give us some answers.

Mr. Lang: On the small peg of this technical new clause it has been possible to hang quite a wide-ranging debate on the Scottish electricity industry, particularly in the context of nuclear energy, and I make no complaint about that. It has been a useful debate, in which a number of valid points have been made, with which I shall try to deal. One or two of the looser points may, of course, be picked up in our later debate.

I will refer first to a group of points which may be characterised as involving financial aspects such as debt and write-off, to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and others have referred. Listening to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), I was struck by the feeling that when we talk about debt some Opposition Members seem automatically to think that we are talking about something disastrous and unsatisfactory which is the result of incompetence, profligacy or some kind of rake's progress arising from unprofitable trading. In fact, we are talking about debt that has been incurred deliberately for a specific purpose, is being re-serviced and will be repaid. Such debt is to provide for investment, and it is investment in assets that has put the Scottish industry in such a strong position as it faces up to privatisation.

It clearly makes sense for the successor companies to have continued access to the national loans fund while they are still wholly owned by the Crown in the period leading up to flotation. The current limit of £3 billion on the boards' borrowings will be maintained. The two Scottish boards currently have debts of around £2·8 billion, arising from successive investments in new plant, most recently at Torness. About £2·3 billion of the debt is incurred by the SSEB and about £500 million by the north board. That investment puts the industry in Scotland in a strong, healthy position to move into the private sector, and removes uncertainty about its prospects.

The hon. Member for Garscadden asked about the European Investment Bank borrowings and other debts. Those loans will be redeemed and converted into national loans fund debt, available at a rate of interest more attractive than from commercial sources. I expect the industry to be no worse off as a result in terms of the interest burden prior to capital restructuring.

We shall first establish the Scottish nuclear company on a wholly equity-funded basis in the ownership of the two Scottish electricity companies. We shall then go to establish an appropriate capital structure for those two plcs by converting some national loans fund debt into Government equity in the form of share capital and reserves. The rest will be converted into debentures. Such capital restructuring is an established business practice and will result in a combination of debentures, issued share capital and reserves which will replace the Scottish industry's extinguished liabilities pound for pound in the companies' books. In the meantime, the Government will continue to fund the industry's requirements for capital from the national loans fund.

We shall go on to dispose, on flotation, of part or all of the Government's equity by selling shares in the Scottish electricity companies. The amount that we obtain in proceeds will depend on market conditions at the time, and may or may not cover the nominal value of shareholders' funds invested in the business. What is important is that the shares on flotation are successfully marketed at a price above their nominal value. We shall choose the capital structure best calculated to maximise returns to the Exchequer and hence to the taxpayer.

Debt will not be written off in the sense of obliteration. Here I repeat a point that was discussed more than once in Committee—this measure will not discharge the obligation to repay. It is not like a bankruptcy or liquidation, in which payment is made in the form of only a few pence in the pound. In the establishment of the capital structure of the companies prior to flotation, debt will be replaced by a mixture of debt and equity geared to market requirements. The sums owed to the NLF will be replaced pound for pound by debentures, share capital and reserves.

The hon. Members for Garscadden and for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), and one or two others, asked whether the cost of decommissioning nuclear stations would be paid for by the consumer or by the taxpayer. I consider it entirely appropriate for the customers to pay the knows costs of generation, whether nuclear or otherwise, as they have already done in relation to Hunterston A, and the SSEB has made provisions for decommissioning and for waste disposal.

We recognise, of course, that long-term changes in costs should not be met in full by future consumers. That is why clause 90 and schedule 12 allow a Government contribution. We have consulted closely with Donald Miller and his colleagues in the nuclear industry about uncertainties associated with some aspects of nuclear back-end costs, and the concerns to which they may give rise following privatisation. The powers that we have taken in clause 90 and schedule 12 have been drafted in the light of those consultations and are designed specifically to provide a framework to meet those concerns. The chairman of the SSEB shares my confidence that the Scottish industry, including its substantial nuclear assets, can look forward to a bright commercial future. He has been closely involved in discussion of the proposals, and has recently indicated his satisfaction with the progress of negotiations, although clearly a number of points of detail remain to be resolved.

Mr. Dewar: Is the Minister saying that since the original consultation which led to the drafting of the Bill no further reassurances, agreements or guarantees have been given that are unknown to the House? Is he saying that there is nothing in the reports that have appeared in *The Scotsman* about further reassurances and undertakings on what he elegantly calls "back-end costs"?

Mr. Lang: I think that I can reassure the hon. Gentleman. We have continuing contacts at both official and, occasionally, ministerial level with the chairmen of both the north and the south boards. I had a meeting with both chairmen only last Friday, when they signed the agreement to replace the joint generation agreement. There has, however, been no secret deal, no special patched-up arrangement, that has not been made plain to the House or provided for in the Bill. Clause 90—which I seem to recall was clause 88 in an earlier version—has been in the Bill since its inception. Any suggestion of a private arrangement or hidden agenda is entirely misplaced.

Like the nuclear industry in the south, the Scottish industry already makes substantial provisions for decommissioning, waste disposal and other anticipated costs. At present, the SSEB has some £764 million

[Mr. Lang]

provided for in that context and further provision of about £58 million for short-term debts. It is significant that last year it was able to adapt without great difficulty to the changes resulting from Chapelcross and the increased costs that that brought, as well as the costs arising from a change in the reprocessing charges of BNFL.

The powers in the Bill provide a backstop whereby the Government can meet unexpected, uncontrollable and substantial cost escalations arising well after the relevant electricity has been consumed, which might impose an unwarranted burden on the industry's future. It is, however, the industry's responsibility to meet the full known costs of nuclear generation and to make appropriate recovery from today's consumers.

Mr. Wilson: I am sure that the Minister is as anxious as we are to get this firmly on the record. I quote again the report in *The Scotsman* of 8 March:

"Neither side was prepared to reveal details of the talks, but the key element is understood to be assurances on the contracts which fix ceiling levels on the amount of any unforeseen rises in nuclear costs and in the contracts which will govern the relationship after privatisation with British Nuclear Fuels Limited."

Is that true or false?

Mr. Lang: I am not answerable for what appears in *The Scotsman*. I am sure that Opposition Members find stories in *The Scotsman* with which they are familiar, and which they consider as inaccurate as some of the stories that I quote from that paper.

As I have said, the chairmen of the boards are in regular touch with our officials, and from time to time with Ministers. Matters concerning the boards are discussed, clarified and resolved. There has been no separate, secret deal or special arrangement—of the kind suggested by *The Scotsman*—in our negotiations. There has been nothing of that sort which is not already known by the House.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) raised the subject of insurance. The industry makes provision for self-insurance against material damage—for example, to its stations—through its mutually owned subsidiary. On third party risk cover against accidents, the industry is required to insure itself for liabilities up to a certain level, which could obviously vary in the light of changing circumstances. Beyond that, under the nuclear legislation, the Government are liable up to a further threshold, and beyond that there is the possibility that Parliament could be asked to grant further cover and indemnity if that were considered necessary. The arrangement is similar to those prevailing throughout Europe and in the United States.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley referred to Chapeldonan, and I understand his constituency interest in that location. Whether or not the next power station in the SSEB's area will be nuclear and, if so, when it will be built obviously depends on future growth and demand and on the relative costs of nuclear and other fuels. I think that it is a point of universal agreement—perhaps one of the few points of universal agreement—that at present there is very substantial over-capacity in the industry in Scotland. The building of another nuclear station in the immediate future, or even in the next few years, therefore seems unlikely.

6.30 pm

Identification of suitable sites for possible future power station development is a matter for the SSEB, and the Government have no power to instruct the board on its holding of land. In fact, the SSEB was unsuccessful in discussions to acquire land at Hunterston from the BSC, and, for the time being at least, that land is ruled out as a possible future site. The board intends to retain the land at Chapeldonan as a strategic option for possible future use. Its judgment is that surrendering the site could prejudice the future provision of economically priced electricity in Scotland. On the other hand, it has made it clear that, given changing circumstances, it would be willing to consider seriously any sympathetic development that might be proposed.

Mr. Foulkes: Surely the Minister agrees that this cannot go on for ever, that at some point the Government must decide whether a power station should be built or whether the land should be released for other purposes. The area is blighted, so no one will come forward with specific suggestions for development. Surely Ministers have an overriding responsibility to say to the electricity board, "Make up your mind—if you do not intend to use the land within the next five years, or even the next decade, you must release it for other purposes." Will the Minister give serious consideration to that suggestion?

Mr. Lang: It would be a mistake to put pressure on the company to make a decision. A decision taken too soon, under pressure of that kind, could be the wrong one. I think that the hon. Gentleman exaggerates the relevance and importance of the site to Girvan. It is an important and useful site, but it is not the only one available for the kind of development that the hon. Gentleman has in mind. Moreover, the board has said that, given changing circumstances, it would look sympathetically at the possibility of considering specific proposals put to it.

I was distinctly puzzled by some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce)—specifically, his reference to the profligate extravagance that had gone into the building and commissioning of Torness. As the decision to go ahead with Torness was one of the few valuable outcomes of the Lib-Lab pact, the hon. Gentleman must be castigating his own party as much as anyone else. I agree with him that Scotland has substantial excess capacity. One might argue about whether it is 110 per cent. or less, but I suggest that it is the result of nationalised industry planning and that once the industry is returned to the private sector we may look forward to a more positive and efficient planning approach and the avoidance of that kind of situation.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I wish to refer to a consumer point which was raised earlier. The Minister made no reference either to the Director General of Electricity Supply or to the shareholders of privatised companies. May we have an assurance that in the private sector the industry will take account of legitimate risks taken by the shareholders and that the companies will not be given carte blanche to pass on to the consumer the cost of their mistakes? The director general might well say, "You made a commercial decision and you made a mistake, so your shareholders and not the consumer must take the risk."

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is complaining of precisely the situation that we have now. Every wrong

decision taken by every electricity board or company in the past few years has been passed on and is being borne by the consumers, and quite a lot of mistakes have been made. Under the regulation arrangements and the activities of the director general, there will be a far more disciplined and competitively oriented approach, which will lead to a more efficient appraisal of the need for the commissioning of new power stations.

The hon. Gentleman's comparison between Hunterston A and Torness seemed to me to be wholly misplaced. I shall come in a moment to his specific point. At this stage, I should say that the proposition that Hunterston A should somehow have been kept open and that Torness should not have been built is extraordinary. Hunterston A is a very much smaller power station. It is now coming towards the end of its commercial life. It is reaching a stage where the economic considerations are becoming paramount. That is why closure was considered. The loss of generating capacity resulting from the closure of Hunterston A will be taken up by Torness not just on its normal design rating output, but on its higher-than-normal design rating output—in other words, because it is working more efficiently than the original design anticipated. The cost of decommissioning Hunterston A, like all the other foreseeable nuclear costs, is already being provided for within the accounts of the industry.

I accept that, from the point of view of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), this is a constituency matter of great importance. As the decommissioning process goes ahead, there will clearly be a continuing need for a considerable number of workers. I hope, and expect, that the impact on the unemployment figures in that constituency will not be so substantial as some people fear. Torness, which is coming on stream, will be an efficient, clean and economical way of generating and delivering electricity.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) revealed not only the split within the Social and Liberal Democratic party over nuclear matters, but also the inherent inaccuracy of the posture of the hon. Member for Gordon. The most absurd proposition of all to which the Liberal party and the Scottish National party have subscribed is that Torness should be sold. If that were done, we should be looking forward to an English company owning Torness and selling back to Scottish consumers electricity that had been generated in Scotland. That seems to me to be a quite extraordinary proposition.

I have not yet said anything about coal, which to some Members—indeed, to the whole House—is a matter of very considerable interest and concern. It is of particular concern to the hon. Member for Garscadden and to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), who raised the issue of coal burn. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the amount of coal burnt in Scotland for electricity generation is very much smaller than the amount burnt in England. Nevertheless, it seemed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and indeed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, that a solution to the negotiations between the coal board and the South of Scotland electricity board could be achieved—a solution that would secure, in Scotland, the use of coal in substantial quantities for a considerable period.

As a result of the commercial negotiations between those two bodies, agreement has been reached on quantity and duration—2 million tonnes per year—but not yet on price. Price is an important component of any agreement, but we have made considerable progress in those negotiations. Of course, the duration of the contract is linked with the interconnector, which we may have an opportunity to debate further on the next group of amendments. I emphasise that the negotiations must be between the two boards, and must be conducted in a commercial manner. Only in that way can the best interests of the consumer be served.

As to whether the coal is to be opencast or deep-mined, that too must be a matter for the boards. At present something like half, or even more than half, of the coal mined in Scotland is open cast. That enables British Coal to sell more coal at a more competitive rate. The interests of the consumer and the interests of the industry in Scotland have to be taken very seriously into account. It would be quite wrong to force on British Coal and on the electricity board a solution based on coal priced higher than was necessary simply because it was all deep mined.

Mr. Eadie: I want to be perfectly clear about what the Minister is telling the House. In the course of his reply, he talked about commercial judgment and a commercial decision between the two parties. He said earlier that he and his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State felt that there should be some sort of agreement and understanding. Is he saying that an agreement has been reached, but that some details have yet to be filled in and that the matter will be settled in the boardroom rather than in the courts? Can the Minister give the House an assurance on that point?

Mr. Lang: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that matters will be settled in the boardroom rather than in the courts, since it is essentially a matter for the coal board and the electricity board. I am saying that progress has been made and that agreement has been reached on two important components of any deal. I hope very much—I believe that it is possible—that agreement will be reached on the third component. Certainly the pressure of the deadline of 31 March has now been lifted.

We have had a wide-ranging debate, hung on the peg of a narrow and essentially technical new clause. I was reassured that during the debate there was no criticism of the structure of the new clause, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 2

Depute Director in Scotland

'There shall be a depute director general of electricity supply who shall carry out the functions of the Director in Scotland. He shall have his office in Scotland and shall be responsible to the Secretary of State of Scotland.'.—*[Mr. Dewar.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Dewar: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 15—*Director General of Electricity Supply*—

'There shall be appointed an Officer, to be known as the Scottish Director General of Electricity Supply, who shall be responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland and shall

[Madam Deputy Speaker Miss Betty Boothroyd]

assume all of the functions of the Director as they relate to Scotland and to the activities of the Scottish electricity companies.'.

Amendment No. 153, in clause 62, page 46, line 13, at end add—

'(c) one which shall be designated as the Scottish export company which shall be wholly owned by the two Scottish electricity companies in (a) above and which shall have responsibility for selling any surplus electricity generated in Scotland.'.

Amendment No. 150, in clause 62, page 46, line 30, at end add—

'(6) The two Scottish Companies shall establish a Scottish Electricity Research Trust. They shall provide funds of not less than 5 per cent. on net profits. The Secretary of State in consultation with the Director shall appoint 10 Trustees who shall have the responsibility of administering the Trust. The Trust shall carry out or commission research into the environmental effects of supplying electricity in Scotland, alternative sources of electricity suitable to the terrain and climate of Scotland and the most economical use of electricity generated.'.

Mr. Dewar: I am aware of the fact that there is a lot of business to be done tonight. Therefore, I shall be extremely brief and I hope that the House will forgive me if I confine my remarks to new clause 2. Some of my hon. Friends may wish to refer to other matters that are dealt with in this group.

I shall deal with the comparatively simple proposition that Scotland should appoint a depute director general of electricity supply whose remit would be to look after Scottish interests. The new clause takes its form from our first preference—exhaustively debated in Committee, thanks to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton)—that Scotland should have a regulator. That was not accepted by the Government. As the matter was exhaustively debated, there is little point in returning to it. However, we invite the House to write into the Bill a safeguard that has been verbally given. It is common ground between me and the Minister that a Scottish official should work within the Director General of Electricity Supply's organisation, that he should be charged with responsibility for Scotland and that he should be based in Scotland. As that has been conceded, a provision ought to be included in the Bill to take account of that point. It is very much in that spirit that the new clause has been tabled.

The protection of the consumer and the proper regulation of the industry are matters of enormous sensitivity and importance. I hardly need to remind the Minister of that fact. We are handing over an industry in which, as Ministers have hurried to tell us, the competition will never be classic. A public utility is to be replaced by a private monopoly. In those circumstances, it is important that adequate protection for consumers should be provided and that the different structure of the Scottish industry should be taken fully into account.

That need has been dramatically highlighted during the last few weeks with the announcement of an 8 per cent. increase in Scottish electricity prices for the next financial year. That has already been heavily criticised. Mr. John Banham, the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, has referred to the Budget strategy being wrecked by the Government scoring inflationary own goals. He went on to say:

"It is all the more irritating to business when the rises are seen to be totally unnecessary."

He linked that reference particularly to the news about the price rises in Scotland. The case for strong regulation of the public interest is made by these events. I hope that the Minister will comment on the reasons for the increase. Such a comment is relevant since we are considering the kind of regulation that is needed and the need for the new clause.

I remind the Minister that Scotland has always been told that it has low-cost, competitive power, that it has made a big investment in nuclear power, that it is in a strong competitive position and that privatisation is good news for the consumer. There was no question about a non-fossil fuel obligation. That was an academic point in Scotland's case. It could look forward to a very much happier future, by implication, than that to which those south of the border could look forward because of the pressures there.

There is genuine puzzlement on this side of the House and in Scotland generally about that statement. The Minister made a big virtue of the fact that the return on capital expected of the electricity boards in Scotland would be 2·7 per cent., rising in 1988-89 to 2·8 per cent., while in England the return on assets, valued on the current cost basis, would be 4·75 per cent. Given that tremendous gap, it is extraordinary that Scotland should face a far more substantial increase than that which will be imposed south of the border.

It is a sad comment on this Government's bona fides that, during the last year, the electricity consultative councils have protested in the strongest possible terms about a wage settlement—which, in their view, is both inflationary and unnecessary—that is being inflicted on the Scottish people.

6.45 pm

The electricity consultative council for the north of Scotland has expressed "deep disappointment" over the rise. It said:

"Members have valiantly tried to persuade the board"—

that is the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board—

"to limit any increase on the standard domestic tariff."

However, they were unable to do so. I have in my hand the press release by the electricity consultative council for the south of Scotland. It refers to its disappointment about

"the continuing deterioration in comparative electricity prices in the area of the SSEB compared with those in England and Wales where the proposed increases average 6·5 per cent."

It goes on to say:

"The council was concerned about the possible effect of privatisation on SSEB costs and their impact on tariffs. There is continuing worry about interest charges associated with Torness and with the very substantial nuclear generating capacity in Scotland and concern about future nuclear charges in terms of fuel reprocessing and decommissioning."

The general pattern emerges of a substantial increase in charges—much higher than those in England—at a time when the preliminary advertisements for privatisation suggested the very opposite. It has been carried through in the teeth of strong opposition from the Government's own appointed consumer watchdogs. That makes the case for the new clause.

The Minister referred to the fact that, with the chairmen of the two boards, he took part in a little ceremony on 31 March when he commended the progress towards privatisation and witnessed the endorsement of certain operational agreements by the two boards. As I

look through the pious expressions of satisfaction that the Minister published in his Scottish Office press release, I cannot help but reflect on the fact that on 30 March—the day before—the 8 per cent. price increase had been announced. The Minister did not see fit to comment on or to explain why Scotland had to face such an increase. On the evidence that is available to us, we believe that the increase is unjustified. It is part of the price that we are being asked to pay for privatisation.

The Minister's performance has been completely unsatisfactory. He has let down his own consumer bodies —as they have made very clear. In those circumstances, consumer protection must be placed at the top of our agenda. We ought to insist on the new clause. It is not what we wanted originally, but it would provide some protection. The need for such a clause has been made doubly relevant by the sad news about prices during the past few weeks and also by the clearly perceived danger that standards will be allowed to slip and that vigilance will be dropped, given the potential for abuse that privatisation will provide.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Although I support new clause 2, I prefer new clause 15. The character of the Scottish industry is such that there ought to be a separate director for Scotland. However, the thrust of both new clauses suggests that Scotland's distinctive character should be recognised within the new arrangements.

As for the 8·5 per cent. price increase, I believe that Scotland has fallen down the crack as between the responsibility of a nationalised industry and an about-to-be-privatised industry. Any Minister who was doing his job properly by defending consumer interests —he is the only person with the power to do so—would have refused to allow an increase of that kind in advance of privatisation. The economic criteria do not justify it.

He should have been so embarrassed by it as to recognise that he must either resist the increase or explain it. He has done neither. We are worse served with no Scottish director and with such a Minister than we might have been had the situation been reversed. I cannot believe that if a Scottish director had been in place he would have allowed the increase to go through. He would certainly have investigated the matter thoroughly and, unless there was a legitimate reason for the increase, he would have told the electricity companies to think again.

The Minister knows perfectly well that I am not opposed to privatisation in principle. The structure of the industry as it stands is both uncompetitive and unresponsive to the consumer—these increases prove it —but all this reinforces my belief that we should restructure the industry in the public sector and prove that we can open it up to effective competition before we move it out of the public sector. The Minister has completely failed either to accept his responsibility to defend the consumers' interest or to ensure that, in privatisation, we are creating a structure in which the distinctive and different character of the Scottish industry is taken fully into account.

I know that other hon. Members wish to speak and I do not want to delay the House. I feel that the clauses are both appropriate and relevant, and I shall certainly support them.

Mr. Hood: In my speech on Second Reading I forecast that this Bill, along with the poll tax and the privatisation of health care and the water industry, would be one of the large nails in the Government's coffin at the next general election. I am pleased to say tonight, having sat through almost all the 156 hours of the Committee, that experience confirms my view that this is indeed the case. I am particularly pleased to see the Secretary of State in his place today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) counted the number of hours that the Secretary of State managed to put into the Committee; I am sure that the Secretary of State knows this but, in case he does not, he was there for 23 of the 156 hours. Never once, however, when he was there, or when the Under-Secretary of State —who looked so unconvincing throughout the whole of the Committee stage—was there, did he justify in any way the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

The whole case is based on myths—the myths of the market, the choice of the consumer and, the one that takes the biscuit, the fact that electricity will be cheaper. At all these three hurdles the Government's argument fell flat on its face. When it came to Scotland, not only did the Government not have a case, not only were they weak, but they were pathetic.

In Committee we had five Scottish hon. Members, my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) and myself, representing Labour, and two from the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). Some of us were interested to note that the Scottish National party was not represented on the Committee. We are informed that its members were offered a position on the Committee and refused it. That says a lot about their so-called rhetoric on the matter of their interest in the Scottish coal industry.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) has trailed his coat, but he does me less than justice. He must be aware that I spent a year on this matter in the Select Committee on Energy. After reading his speeches, and those by his hon. Friends in the Standing Committee, and seeing all the ammunition with which they were provided, I just wish that they had utilised the time a little better.

Mr. Hood: I am as little impressed by the absence of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) from the Committee as by the comments that he has just made. His party is coming to be known as the "walk out, throw out or abstention" party.

The fear of hon. Members on the Opposition Benches is that privatisation of the electricity supply industry will spell the death of the Scottish coal industry, a fear which has not been dissipated by the news that we have heard tonight, when last week we were under the impression that an agreement had been made with the South of Scotland electricity board. That so-called agreement seems flimsier than ever. I am sorry that the Secretary of State for Scotland is not here. Certainly, the Secretary of State for Energy is here. The Minister took some of the credit—if that is the word for it—for getting the parties round the table. I do not believe that for one moment. I do not believe that the Secretary of State for Scotland did anything to get the parties round the table.

Far be it from me to cast any praise in the direction of the Secretary of State for Energy, but some of us on the Opposition Benches firmly believe that the impetus came

[Mr. Hood]

from the Secretary of State for Energy and not from the Secretary of State for Scotland. When the latter was criticised for his lack of action in Scotland, it was even worse than that—he should be criticised for his collaboration, because some of us believe that he was collaborating with the SSEB from day one of the dispute. This is no credit to him at all. He is becoming known as an enemy of Scotland and as a traitor to Scotland. Our history has seen many of those but the Secretary of State seems to be competing for the mantle of arch traitor to Scotland.

He is not on his own in competing for that mantle. I had occasion to intervene during a speech in Committee by his hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), who unfortunately is not with us tonight.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): He is in Australia.

Mr. Hood: I do not know where he is. He was nick-named "Bill from Brazil" earlier, but he is not here tonight.

In Committee the hon. Member for Tayside, North said:

"It is essential that the United Kingdom takes advantage of all its natural resources, including the supply of energy. It is therefore in the best interests of the whole of the United Kingdom that Scotland's ability to pass its surplus energy resources to England where there is a demand, is an essential part of our future energy policy. Energy policy has to be United Kingdom policy, and—this is the point that I have been trying to make—as a Scot I find it disturbing when we hear language that is wrapping tartan round the Scots and asking for special privileges."

The hon. Member then went on to say:

"England has an unsatisfied demand. It is therefore in the best interests of the whole of the United Kingdom to have an adequate ability to transfer."

At this stage I intervened to point out to him:

"I am tempted to be impressed by the hon. Gentleman's desire to look after the interests of the United Kingdom. But is he aware that the Secretary of State has been negotiating with the French Government to import French energy into this country and that it will work against a United Kingdom country—Scotland?"

To this the hon. Gentleman responded:

"We have been negotiating with the French and anyone else who wants to buy our electricity. I am a believer in the market place. It makes sense to be able to transfer electricity both ways."

We had to remind the hon. Gentleman that the French were interested not in buying electricity but in selling it.

I am sorry to bore the House with these quotations but this will be the last. The hon. Member for Tayside, North went on to say:

"Opposition Members should study carefully what I have said"—

I can assure the House that we have done that—

"and they will see that my view is we must have a flat playing field so that throughout the United Kingdom there is an opportunity for all consumers to share in the strengths or weaknesses of the whole."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 23 February 1989; c. 1227.]

There we have it: the hon. Member from the Flat Earth Society, the hon. Member for Tayside, North.

Following on an albeit modest contribution from myself, the hon. Member later accused me of special pleading for the Scottish coal industry. He even accused me of using intemperate language, believe it or not. Hon. Members here, with perhaps one exception, would certainly not agree with such an accusation.

I certainly make a plea for common sense and not dogma, for compassion and not hostility, and for consensus not dictatorship. This Bill is all about the dogma of extremism, hostility to miners in mining communities and dictatorship over the Scottish people who do not want and will never want Toryism.

The case for the Scottish coal industry is set in concrete; it is sound on all grounds. We hear much about the problems of the environment. Scottish coal is low in sulphur—far lower than the coal that we are importing from South Africa, Columbia and China. We have vast untapped reserves. Scottish coal is cost-effective when compared with the high cost of power generated by nuclear energy.

7 pm

I have a particular interest in opencast mining because in my constituency I have the largest opencast development in the whole of Europe. Opencast has to be seen in Scotland for what it is and not as it is seen in England. Opencast and deep mining are under the same management in Scotland—British Coal (Scotland). Opencast must not be seen as a replacement for deep-mined coal, as the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) suggested in Committee, but as complementary to it.

May I anticipate the hostility to deep-mined coal by those who favour the expansion of opencast mining? The prices of deep-mined coal and opencast coal are aggregated. There is cross-subsidy, which I accept. One important ingredient is forgotten by the people who are hostile to deep-mined coal and who favour the expansion of opencast mining—the co-operation of local authorities in giving permission to develop opencast mines in areas where there would normally be hostility to it. There is a strong relationship between mining communities and local authorities which leads to support for opencast mining.

We have 400 years of coal reserves in Scotland. We prefer to develop those coal reserves rather than rely on importing coal or highly expensive nuclear power. We do not want privatisation of electricity in Scotland. It is obscene, nonsense and irrelevant to our power generation requirements. Amendment No. 153, tabled by myself and hon. Friends, would ensure an export market for Scottish-generated power. That is necessary for the future of Scotland as a country and an energy producer. We sat for almost 156 hours in Committee addressing that and many other issues.

On Second Reading I referred to the disgraceful spectacle of the Prime Minister tripping through the Lobbies in support of private ports Bills with what I termed as the "Botha boot boys" behind her. I forecast then the demise of Tory Members in constituencies including mining communities, especially in places like Nottingham. The Government are going down the spout with the privatisation of water. Electricity privatisation is another nail in their coffin. That is one funeral that I look forward to attending.

Mr. Salmond: I support new clause 15, which would lead to the establishment of a specific Scottish director general of electricity supply. I am disappointed at the retreat of the Labour party from the position that was

established by the Select Committee on Energy in favour of a Scottish director general which it supported in Committee. I do not think that a depute director general is adequate to serve the real needs of Scotland.

Mr. Maxton: In some way the hon. Gentleman is remarkably naive in the workings of the House. If the Labour party had put down exactly that new clause, I think I can give him the assurance, even if you would not, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it would not have been called.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I give an assurance to all hon. Members that there is no new clause or amendment on the Amendment Paper that is not perfectly proper.

Mr. Salmond: I think that you have answered the point for me, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I point out to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) that new clause 15, which proposes exactly that, is on the Amendment Paper. In the absence of new clause 2, it would have been possible to vote on it. If the hon. Gentleman's argument is that we should propose only amendments or new clauses that are acceptable to the Government, that would limit substantially the ability of the Opposition to put forward amendments.

The argument against a deputy director general and against new clause 2 was made in Committee by the hon. Member for Cathcart. He said:

"I do not see how a dispute between a Scottish board and an English generating board or an area board or company about supply, generation and price will be settled. Will a deputy in Edinburgh, who is responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland, be more responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland than to his immediate boss, the director general sitting in London, whose primary responsibility will be to the licences that he has granted to the various English companies? To which one will he be responsible? Nothing in the Bill explains this."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 12 January 1989; c. 72.]

That is right. Nothing in the Bill explains it; of course, nothing in new clause 2 explains it either. I much prefer the position established in the Select Committee on Energy.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Will the hon. Gentleman make it clear to the House whether the Scottish National party was offered a place on the Electricity Bill Committee and whether it refused to take that place—yes or no?

Mr. Salmond: As I have already pointed out in reply to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) a few moments ago, I spent a year on the Select Committee on Energy considering these very issues. I was surprised at the suggestion that the SNP was not interested in deep coal mining in Scotland. Yesterday I received a letter from the general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers in Scotland thanking me for my efforts on its behalf in the Select Committee. The fact that there is no Scottish Labour Member on the Select Committee on Energy does not lead me to the conclusion that Scottish Labour Members are not interested in the coal mining industry or in energy issues in general.

I was making the point that I much prefer the position established by the Select Committee on Energy on the need for a Scottish director general of electricity supply. I am the only Scottish Member on the Select Committee on Energy. The majority of members are English Conservative Members, yet we reached a unanimous conclusion after a good deal of debate. In the report we said:

"we believe that Scotland's interests will best be served by the establishment of a separate Scottish Regulator, working closely with his English and Welsh counterpart, with regular interchanges of information and staff. The relationship between the Scottish Office and London Departments is an analogy. In this way the distinctive structure of the ESI in Scotland will be mirrored by a distinctive regulatory structure."

It is a remarkable feature of the position of the Scottish Office on the issue that it is not even willing to propose, for the benefit of the Scottish consumer, a level of protection that was insisted upon by English Conservatives on the Select Committee on Energy. It is remarkable that Scottish Office Ministers were not willing to make that point.

The arguments that the Select Committee considered in coming to our conclusion in favour of a separate Scottish director general were, first, that we recognised that within the Scottish structure of the proposed privatisation of electricity there would be no effective competition. Indeed, many would argue that within the English and Welsh structure there will be no effective competition. Certainly, with the duopoly that is proposed for Scotland—with territorial monopolies at any rate for tariff customers—there will be no genuine competition.

Hence the need for protection for Scottish consumers, who otherwise will be exploited by the private electricity companies which will succeed the SSEB and the Hydro Board. Our first point was to recognise the distinctive nature of the Scottish privatisation and of the Scottish electricity system, and the need for special protection for the Scottish consumer.

Secondly, we concluded that there would be occasions when the Scottish exporters of electricity would be in conflict with their English customers. Early on in the Select Committee deliberations, we received evidence from Mr. Harris of the east midlands board. He said that his board would prefer that the grid bought electricity collectively from the Scottish electricity companies because that would lower the price at which electricity would be bought. When we took evidence from Mr. Miller of the SSEB, he argued that tens of millions of pounds could be involved in that issue alone. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Scotland agreed, when giving evidence to the Select Committee that this was an important pricing issue.

If there is a conflict of interest between the Scottish producers of electricity and the English supply companies —the consumers of that electricity—how will a single director general divide his loyalties? Will he be in favour of Scottish producers or English consumers? Hence the importance of having, for the protection of Scottish consumers and Scottish producers of electricity, someone who will not owe his loyalty to a Director General of Electricity Supply located in London.

The third argument which impressed the Select Committee was in relation to the needs of the north of Scotland. We argued strongly in our report that it was not just a matter of a common tariff throughout the Hydro Board area; we had to consider also the need for subsidies for future connections. I see the hon. Member for the Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) in his place. A pensioner couple in his constituency proved to be an excellent example of the need for protection in terms of connection charges for consumers in remote areas.

[Mr. Salmond]

That pensioner couple, on Lewis, were 35 yards from an electricity connection, yet the Hydro Board told them that it would cost them over £3,000, and that, I understand, was the second, revised—and hence lower—price that they were quoted. When the Secretary of State for Scotland appeared before the Select Committee, he seemed to take the view that that pensioner couple had situated their house in the wrong place. He appeared to say that it was their fault for not being nearer than 35 yards to the nearest power connection.

I accept that the legislation guarantees a price for anyone whose home is situated within 50 yards of a power connection. But that is a theoretical right for most consumers, certainly if we are to have charges of £3,000 or more for a 35-yard connection. The Select Committee took the view that, the needs of remote areas of Scotland were not satisfied by existing connection arrangements alone and we said that the development of such areas, with new houses and more people, would occur only if new connection charges were reasonable. That would be a key responsibility of a Scottish director general.

7.15 pm

In Standing Committee, the Minister of State argued that a single director general at United Kingdom level having a dual responsibility would not be a problem, even though he would be responsible both to the Secretary of State for Scotland and to the Secretary of State for Energy. The Minister of State argued that the Government spoke with one voice, claiming that both Secretaries of State spoke on behalf of the Government.

It was an interesting concept. Can we expect the two Secretaries of State to speak with one voice on these matters? That question was put to the test a few weeks later when, on 25 January, I questioned the Secretary of State for Energy about whether it was likely that the main office of the United Kingdom Director General of Electricity Supply would be located in Scotland. After conceding that he had not given the matter a great deal of thought, the right hon. Gentleman decided—off the cuff and in front of the Select Committee—that his answer should be no. I asked him why not, and he replied:

"Because we believe that he"—

the Director General of Electricity Supply—

"will have a duty to Scotland, but he will also have a duty to England and Wales, and that is far and away the biggest part of his job."

The right hon. Gentleman went on to use a phrase that he may now regret using. When I argued that the Select Committee might take a different view, he said that that was unlikely, and he described as "an eccentric notion" my argument that the director general's main office should be in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland appeared before the Select Committee a few weeks later, on 22 February. I thought that, as the two Ministers were said to speak with one voice on Government policy, it would be interesting to ask him similar questions. The Secretary of State for Scotland did not seem to believe that it was "an eccentric notion". He said that, on the contrary, it was not an issue on which the Government had reached a conclusion, and he added:

"It is not a word that I would have chosen"

when asked if my argument was an eccentric notion. The right hon. Gentleman seemed sympathetic to the idea of having the office located in Scotland, and I have subsequently been in correspondence with the Minister of State, who has assured me that the Government have an open mind on the issue.

We can see the fallacy of the contention that there is no problem in having dual responsibility, the belief that the director general can report, on the one hand, to the Secretary of State for Energy and, on the other, to the Secretary of State for Scotland. The Government argue that there is no difference between the views of the two Secretaries of State, but even on that issue, when questioned before the Select Committee, we saw a substantial difference of view.

In those circumstances and with the conflicts of interest that might arise in the electricity supply industry, all Members representing Scottish constituencies must wonder whose view will prevail. I have no doubt that it will be the view of the Secretary of State for Energy, and the Scottish Office will tag along behind and try to reconcile the position at a later date.

It was said earlier that the recent price increase of 8 per cent. announced for the Scottish electricity industry represents an outstanding example of why we need a Scottish director general with responsibility, power and authority to intervene on behalf of the interests of Scottish consumers. That is particularly important in view of the suggestion that somehow the deal that has been arrived at between British Coal and the SSEB might have been the cause of these price increases. I heard the Minister of State suggest on the radio a few days ago that that deal might have been responsible for such sharp price increases.

The figures show that his view is nonsense. In the last three years, there has been a 28 per cent. decline in the real price charged for coal supplies to the SSEB. Indeed, the price charged for coal is only a fraction of the SSEB's overall costs. In the same three years, according to evidence given to the Select Committee by the SSEB, there has been an unexpected increase, costing the SSEB £240 million, in the nuclear costs of fuel reprocessing, waste treatment and decommissioning.

If we had a Scottish director general in Scotland, nobody—not the Minister or the SSEB—would be allowed to get away with misleading explanations for an over-the-odds increase in electricity charges, such as giving the impression that a minor and declining part of the SSEB's costs can be held responsible for such an exceptional increase in charges. A Scottish director general is necessary so that Scottish consumers can be told the truth about their electricity bills and protected from unreasonable increases in future.

Everything about the legislation—the lack of competition and the vulnerability of Scottish consumers—surely leads us to the conclusion that Scottish consumers need the maximum protection in the privatised structure. That protection should be provided by a Scottish director general with the full authority and prestige of that position. He should be nobody's deputy, nobody's office boy, but a Scottish director general reporting to the Secretary of State for Scotland. I very much hope that we shall be able to vote on new clause 15.

Mr. McAvoy: I am well aware of the constraints of time. I only wish that previous contributors had paid some attention to them. I have no intention of dealing with any of the points raised by members of the Scottish National party. The comments of the hon. Member for Banff and

Buchan (Mr. Salmond) were counter-productive. When we agree about so much, his pejorative and speculative attacks invite response, and I am certainly not prepared to listen to his remarks without replying. The hon. Gentleman and other Members of his party make great play of trying to get on to Committees and interfering with the processes of the House, yet when they were offered a place on the Standing Committee considering the Electricity Bill they refused that opportunity. Having refused an opportunity to participate in the processes of the House, they have no credibility whatever when they try to disrupt those processes.

Opposition Members who took the opportunity to work on behalf of the people of Scotland repeatedly made the point that all logic and fairness pointed to the need for a separate Scottish director general. The Minister of State, Scottish Office, made great play about the unionist and separatist arguments, but every move that the Government make reinforces the sentiment that Scotland will not have a fair deal from England within the British structure. Paradoxically, the so-called Scottish Conservative and Unionist party is the main driving force in encouraging resentment against the union which the majority of Opposition Members favour.

The integrated monopoly status of the electricity industry in Scotland and the fact that the public monopoly is to become a private monopoly demonstrate the need for a separate Scottish director general. Within the set-up envisaged by the Government, there is no clear responsibility for the privatised Scottish industry. The Select Committee on Energy observed that Scotland is differe- . and there should have been a separate Bill. New clause 2 would at least ensure that there would be a director general for Scotland answerable to the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The pricing impact requires a strictly Scottish approach. Scottish consumers will pay a price based on United Kingdom average generating costs, not on Scottish generating costs which are lower. Because of the weather and climatic conditions, Scottish consumers already incur higher costs than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said in Committee that Mr. Donald Miller, the chairman of the SSEB, was supporting a single United Kingdom director general. My hon. Friend rightly suggested that Mr. Miller's support was at least partly based on the hope that privatisation would be a vehicle for maximising profits for his privatised company, which presumably would result in extra payment to him personally.

There is a desperate need for a director general concerned directly with Scotland, especially when we consider what has happened before privatisation. The SSEB increased prices by 8 per cent.—a greater increase than in England and Wales, and more than was necessary to keep in line with inflation. That is what has happened under the direction of Mr. Miller without the benefits, as he would see them, of a privatised structure.

A further demonstration of the need for a Scottish director general is the ludicrous situation between SSEB and British Coal. A great deal has been said about that and some important points have been raised. If Mr. Miller seeks to minimise costs for the SSEB, perhaps he should reduce the legal costs incurred in such disputes. Conservative Members may say that the situation between the SSEB and British Coal shows that there is no need for a Scottish director general because two Scottish institutions are in dispute and the presence of the Secretary of State for Scotland did not prevent the development of such a damaging dispute. That is absolutely right. The Secretary of State's presence had no effect and the political world could not have an impact on the dispute because, disgracefully, the Secretary of State for Scotland did not see fit to intervene in a matter which was causing damage to Scotland. If we had a truly independent Scottish director general, it is inconceivable that he or she would not have intervened on behalf of the Scottish people.

The philosophy of privatisation is the free market and the survival of the fittest. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan rightly mentioned that if there are commercial disputes between the Scottish producers and the English and Welsh consumers, according to the free market philosophy on which the privatisation is based, it is inevitable that England and Wales will have greater influence. According to the Government's philosophy, might is right, so England and Wales will have more voice and that will count against Scotland. That is the clear logic of the Government's privatisation policies. New clause 2 tries to protect Scottish interests from a Tory Government who have no support in Scotland for their Bill.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): In speaking in favour of new clause 2 I shall endeavour to keep my remarks as brief as possible by focusing on one part of Scotland and on one specific problem. I wish to focus on the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, covered by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, and the problem of ensuring the supply of electricity to remote areas of the Highlands and Islands at a reasonable cost.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said that it might seem odd that the Highlands and Islands had a very high percentage of connections compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. Despite the remote locations of many of the properties, a great number of them have been connected over the years. That is due to the unique ethos that has governed the hydro-electric board since its inception and given it a determination to provide electricity to remote areas at a reasonable cost and to spread the costs, which would otherwise fall very hard upon particular individuals in remote areas, among consumers and taxpayers in the locality.

In recent years there has been a second factor to explain the wide extent of electricity connection in the Highlands and Islands—the availability of finance from the EEC through the European regional development fund, which has been channelled into the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board to enable it to connect people living in remote rural areas.

The Bill will do away with both factors which enable those living in remote areas to be connected to the electricity supply, because privatisation will do away with the private status of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board and make it a privatised company. The board will thus lose access to the EEC money that it has had until now. I deeply regret that the Government have chosen to go ahead with the privatisation and did not take the step that they took in regard to the privatisation of Caledonian MacBrayne, which had a similar EEC financial status. When they realised that that finance would be lost, they abandoned their privatisation plans. I wish that the Government had taken the same route with the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

I wish to put the case for my constituents. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has already mentioned the problems that they face, although he did not cite the worst examples to be found in my constituency of individuals requiring electricity and having to pay extraordinary and impossible sums to obtain it. In one community in my constituency, a household has been asked to pay £63,000 to receive an electricity supply—a sum that is clearly way beyond the means of the couple who occupy the house. In case the Minister thinks that a nouveau riche couple have moved into the Highlands and Islands, I will tell him that the couple lived there long before the hydro board was established. They have been bypassed by the age of electricity.

7.30 pm

Another significant case is that of Mr. MacDonald living in the village of Balallan. He did not choose to build a new house in an impossibly remote and inaccessible area. In fact, the new house is only 35 yards from the mains electricity supply at the edge of one of the largest villages in my constituency. Yet he is being asked to pay more than £3,000 for the privilege of receiving electricity. In Committee that case was put to the Minister very ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). The Minister's reply was that if Mr. MacDonald waited two or three years there might be a reduction in the price to £1,500 or so. As my constituent is 78 years old, that was not the most gracious of suggestions.

The publicity given to the case by various newspapers and by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield has stung the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. It has actually produced a booklet relating to the case, which has been sent to every Scottish Member of Parliament and to every newspaper in Scotland, because it is so fearful of the adverse publicity that it has been receiving. That seems to suggest that the board at least has a guilty conscience.

The first thing that one sees in the booklet is a "Summary of Activity" which stretches over a year and a half, but it is clear that nothing was done by the board in that year and a half to help my constituents to receive their electricity. All that happened was that a series of letters were sent explaining why my constituents could not receive electricity. In letters to me, the chairman of the board has made it clear that after privatisation consumers in remote areas cannot expect to receive any help from the general body of consumers in relation to connection and supply. That statement shows the future facing remote areas after privatisation. The ability to receive electricity will depend how remote one is from the mains electricity supply and it will come down simply to ability to pay.

I have mentioned only a minority of cases in the Highlands and Islands, but hundreds of properties in the area face such obstacles. That is why I, my constituents and others fear the effects of the Bill.

Mr. Lang: The House would have had more sympathy with the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) if he had acknowledged that under the arrangements that we are introducing the successor company to the hydro board will be required to set a common tariff precisely to benefit his constituents. He might also have acknowledged the virtual completion by the industry, with Government and European assistance, of the supply network. He might have acknowledged the existence of the uneconomic rural development programme which the board has operated.

The hon. Member referred to the Balallan case. Although the sum of £3,100 may seem large, it is already £600 lower as a result of the negotiations with the board. Someone proposing to build a new house in such an area —we are not talking about an existing house—would take such a figure into account. Indeed, the applicants were told when they sought planning permission what the cost of supplying electricty would be. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman might have been more forthcoming on some of the details of the circumstances affecting the Western Isles and the consumption of electricity there.

The wording of proposed new clause 2 suggests that a deputy director general of electricity supply should be directly responsible to the Secretary of State for the regulation of the industry in Scotland. This would remove from the director general the duties which the Bill lays upon him in relation to Scotland and would effectively result in a separate regulator. New clause 15, proposed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) goes one step further and prescribes the appointment of a scottish director.

It is quite clear to us that neither case would be beneficial, since both new clauses ignore the fact that the Scottish companies will be competing in a British market. We are clear that two separate regulators would be inefficient; would fail adequately to monitor common carriage arrangements and fair trading practices across the border; and would lose the opportunity for yardstick comparisons across the whole British industry to bring out best practices and provide leverage for increased efficiency. Our proposal for a deputy director general in Scotland reporting direct to the director general, who in turn reports to the Secretary of State, ensures that the Scottish industry has the best of both worlds: a representative of the director general based in Scotland, but still part of a single regulatory regime. New clause 15 is therefore unnecessary as well as impracticable.

Neither do I see any need for the detailed structure of the director general's organisation to be set out in the Bill as new clause 2 suggests. The Bill rightly restricts itself to describing the functions and responsibility of the director general, as the regulator of the single British market. The director general will be appointed jointly by the Secretaries of State for Energy and for Scotland and be responsible to both Secretaries of State. There is no need for the Bill to provide for the details of the director general's office. The House is well aware of the categoric assurances it has been given on a number of occasions that the director general will have reporting to him a deputy director general based in Scotland. That arrangement is quite different and is preferable to the confused view set out in the new clause.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and others referred to prices. They made the mistake that all Socialists seem to make on such occasions. They assume that the Government decide what the prices should be. That may have been the case under the Labour Government, but it is not the case under this Government. Such matters are decided by the industry and, in determining tariffs, the industry must take account of a range of factors including cost structure and the need to make an adequate return on assets employed.

The tariff increase in Scotland in 1988-89—4·75 per cent.—was significantly lower than in England and Wales

where prices ranged in their increase from 7 per cent. to 12 per cent. The recently announced tariff increases in Scotland for this year of 8 per cent. from 1 April are slightly higher than in England and Wales but still lower than the average increases last year south of the border. The tariff increase in Scotland is greater this year than last, principally because of the effect of higher rates of inflation on operating costs generally, but also reflecting the higher than anticipated fuel costs—both nuclear and coal. Even with the latest increase, tariffs in Scotland are 9 per cent. lower in real terms than in 1982-83. One can compare that with the record of the last Labour Government, when tariffs rose by 20 per cent. in real terms.

Tariffs are primarily a matter for the boards to decide and in determining the level, they have to take into account a complex range of financial and operational factors, including the financial targets agreed with the Government. The financial target for 1989-90 is 2·7 per cent., set jointly to reflect the board's shared responsibility for nuclear generation. That holds the target at broadly the same level as it has been for the past two years.

There is no reason why tariffs should go up as a consequence of privatisation. Privatisation of the two companies will lead to increased efficiency and thus, in time, to lower prices. Competition in the broadest sense and private sector disciplines will put downward pressure on the costs that go into consumers' electricity bills. Where a monopoly will remain, prices to the consumer will be subject to strict and fair regulation and there will be downward pressure through the price condition. The restructuring proposals will create two companies satisfactorily balanced in terms of the mix of generating plant, spare capacity and forecast levels of profitability. Any tariff divergence will, therefore, relate substantially to the effectiveness of management decisions rather than simply to the structure.

The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) referred to coal. I must point out to him that since we came to power, we have put over £1 billion a year in deficit and non-deficit grant into the coal industry. Nobody can say that we have not taken full account of our responsibilities in that regard. Equally, it is quite wrong to imagine that prices are uninfluenced by the price of coal. If the SSEB were forced to take coal at a high price, there would clearly be implications for the price of electricity.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) quoted the Select Committee on Energy on the question of a separate regulator, but he neglected to record the Select Committee's view that the arguments for and against a separate regulator were finely balanced. We feel that they are substantially weighted towards a single Great Britain regulator, but we took account of the Select Committee's arguments in reaching a conclusion. We also note with interest that both the boards in Scotland favour a single director general and that the electricity consultative council for the south of Scotland stated:

"Regulation in Scotland needs to be an integral part of the UK system of regulation while recognising the different circumstances of the industry in Scotland."

Mr. Salmond: Of course the Select Committee considered the arguments for and against carefully, but the conclusion it came to was for a separate Scottish regulator. The Minister has not yet answered the question why, given that he found other aspects of the Select Committee report so useful, he did not take that recommendation on board. Incidentally, the Select Committee had only one Scottish member.

Mr. Lang: We took account of the recommendations of the Select Committee, but we also took account of other viewpoints and aspects of the matter that were relevant and important in reaching the conclusion that I described a few moments ago. The new clause will do nothing for consumers in Scotland. Consumers in Scotland will derive benefits from the rights that the Bill will give them, the competition that will be introduced through the privatisation of the industry, the downward pressure of the regulator and the more efficient operation of the industry in the private sector. Those are the ways in which the rights of consumers will be best protected, so I urge the House to reject the new clause.

7.45 pm

Mr. Maxton: I shall be brief, as I am aware that the House wants to bring this debate to a conclusion.

I must say to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that the Labour party now accepts that every time a Scottish National Member speaks here, or anywhere else, his target is not the Government or the Conservative party, but the Labour party. The Scottish nationalists know that it is in their political interest to ensure the return of a Conservative Government rather than a Labour Government at the next general election. The Scottish nationalists are interested not in the people of Scotland, but only in their own cheap political ends. That is what the hon. Gentleman's speech was about.

We would prefer first not to have any privatisation of the electricity supply in Scotland. Our second preference is that there should be a wholly separate directorate and our third is new clause 2. We believe that only a separate Scottish director or one who is responsible to the Secretary of State for Scotland, whether a deputy or not, can ensure that the special needs of the Scottish industry and of the Scottish consumer are protected.

It is strange that just a week before the boards announced their price increases, for which the Minister disclaimed all responsibility, the Scottish Office, in the name of the Secretary of State, put out a release saying:

"The Secretary of State for Scotland has agreed a financial target for 1989-90 with the South of Scotland Electricity board and the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board."

It is beyond belief that the Minister can argue the he has no responsibility for the price increases when he is setting the financial targets for the boards. What the Minister has said differs strongly from what the chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board, Mr. Joughin, said when referring to the 8 per cent. price increase that his board was introducing. He said:

"These price increases are designed to ease the path towards privatisation."

Mr. Lang: The chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board claims that he was misquoted and that he did not say that.

Mr. Maxton: It is the easiest opt-out in the world to claim that one was misquoted. I am sure that all of us, at one time or another, have tried to claim that when we have said something that we regretted. I have spoken to Mr. Joughin and others and I am sure that his original remark was the correct view.

[Mr. Maxton]

We believe that the Scottish industry should never be privatised and that there should be a director who is responsible for it. We are not satisfied that assurances given by Tory Ministers mean anything in terms of final promises. I call on my hon. Friends to join me in voting for the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 205, Noes 266.

Division No. 140] **[7.46 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley

Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Grist, Ian
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

New Clause 3

British National Nuclear Corporation

'A Crown Company, the British National Nuclear Corporation, shall be formed in which the power stations of the United Kingdom will vest on a date to be appointed by the Secretary of State.'.—*[Sir Trevor Skeet.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: New clause 10—*The British Nuclear Company*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall direct the generating board to place all its property, rights and liabilities relating to nuclear power in a company designated as the British Nuclear Company.

(2) The British Nuclear Company and all its property, rights and liabilities shall remain wholly owned by the Crown.'.

New clause 16—*Nuclear levy*—

'(1) It shall be the duty of the Director to publish annually and distribute to each of the Consumer Committees, a report showing the difference in that year between the price of electricity generated from fossil and non-fossil fuel.

(2) The Consumer Committees shall have a duty to publish the findings of the Director's report in a manner and form that may be easily understood by electricity consumers.'.

Amendment No. 148, in clause 30, page 24, line 13, leave out subsection (1) and insert—

'(1) The public electricity suppliers shall take steps to ensure that the mix of fuel sources and generation technologies available to them is adequate to ensure the long term security of supply to their customers.

(2) The Director and the Secretary of State shall have powers to require, from time to time, that the pubic electricity suppliers demonstrate to them that their policies in fulfilment of subsection (1) above are adequately contributing to the long term security of supply.'.

Amendment No. 147, in clause 30, page 24, line 14, after 'suppliers', insert

'and appropriate consumers' bodies including the consumer committees and independent consumer organisations.'.

Government amendments Nos. 31 to 34.

Amendment No. 160, in clause 61, page 45, line 8, at beginning insert

'save for the nuclear power stations for which the Secretary of State shall make proper and reasonable provision for retention in public ownership.'.

8 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet: I make it clear that all the power stations dealt with in the new clause are nuclear. Being well disposed to the nuclear industry, I am disturbed that steps

[Sir Trevor Skeet]

are now being taken to unsettle the industry. My experience has been that, for a good many years, particularly in respect of the nuclear waste repository which was scheduled for an area near my constituency, the public have not been ready for a transfer of nuclear assets to the private sector. The public have not had sufficient time or are reluctant to accept the risks inherent in nuclear power, particularly if it is outside the public sector. A Crown company could provide a high-quality assurance to a nervous public who still look to the state for the protection of the environment. I am certain that, in time, that attitude will change and that the nuclear sector will be fully privatised.

It is rather odd that the Opposition and myself will probably vote in the same Lobby tonight, but for entirely different reasons. I am pro-nuclear and Opposition Members are anti-nuclear and pro-coal. It is the irony of history that men of different persuasion must be honest and put forward the arguments. I propose to advance to the Secretary of State the arguments about why a serious mistake is being made in this Bill.

I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for being here tonight. After all, he has many obligations. Important personalities are in the United Kingdom at the moment, and he could be enjoying an important dinner elsewhere.

My first argument is that much of the industry will remain with the state following the passage of the Bill. The production of nuclear electricity and the fuel cycle that is dependent upon it, including the reprocessing and recycling of plutonium and uranium and the disposal of nuclear waste, should properly be retained in a single integrated company. I agree that that is not the CBI's view. At the moment, the whole industry is in the hands of the state and, subject to the passing of the Bill, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and British Nuclear Fuels plc will remain so. My simple argument is that we should keep all relevant parts of the industry together. It is logical and it makes commercial sense to do so.

Secondly, many of the obligations to the nuclear industry—for example, those in schedule 12 and civil third liability—remain with the state. The obligations arising under clause 90 and schedule 12, comprising subsidies from the revenue for nuclear storage, reprocessing, waste disposal and decommissioning, should be monitored and scrutinised within the state system until the regulatory authority establishes its competence. It is an entirely new body, and we have no idea of how it will behave or perform. Further, third party civil liability for serious accidents remains the responsibility of the Government. Due to its extent, that liability is virtually unassignable to the private sector. The extent of liability remains covered by the Paris and Brussels supplementary conventions, which are multinational agreements.

The House should recognise that the nuclear option is also expensive for a private company. For example, I refer to construction overruns. The 450 MW Dungeness B took about 18 years to complete and had a load factor of barely 1 per cent., compared with the average of Magnox stations of 79·7 per cent. Hartlepool took 19 years to complete, and Heysham 1 took 17 years to complete. It is possible that construction overruns for contemporary stations will be reduced if not eliminated. I am glad to say that the work of some of the more recent AGRs has been praiseworthy.

Planning inquiries are diabolically expensive—the Sizewell inquiry cost £20 million—but we can reduce it to £10 million apiece if the planning process can be simplified or rationalised. I stress that there is an increasing burden of BNFL reprocessing charges. They are escalating fast, well beyond the provisions made in schedule 12.

Another point which the House should bear in mind is that on-going research and development is an essential ingredient of modern technology, and limited expenditure or economising tend to be counter-productive.

Energy remains a long-term strategy. The risks of a change in technology are enormous. It is unlikely that the market will provide the necessary investment in the formative and unprofitable stages. That is at least the lesson to be derived from the development of nuclear power in France. With the eventual rundown of fossilised fuels, fission or fusion will probably become inevitable, and Her Majesty's Government should now be in a position to direct it, as a long-term strategy, undisturbed by short-term considerations.

Technology for the production of electricity may change dramatically in coming years, with extensive penalties for obsolescence, particularly in conventional thermal nuclear power. The fusion route, via the Torus model at Culham in Oxfordshire, could be abandoned in favour of the simpler Fleischmann-Pons process, using palladium electrodes at normal temperatures. It is certainly premature to make any judgment of that.

I emphasise to the Secretary of State that a more sympathetic approach towards the potential of the fast reactor for recycling reprocessed products and depleted uranium could substantially advance the energy yield of a given quantity of uranium. The THORP plant of BNFL makes sense only if it produces uranium and plutonium for recycling as fuels in fast reactors. It is regrettable that much of the research on that has been deferred or handed over to other nations to continue. Further research into magnetohydrodynamics could be valuable as a technology for converting thermal energy directly into electricity, thus avoiding the use of turbines.

The state cannot afford to be out of the race for the development of cheap fuels and, as we are in a technological sector—that is the nuclear industry—I maintain that it should be in state hands.

The nuclear element could seriously embarrass the flotation. The flotation of National Power could be jeopardised by the nuclear element unless funds and guarantees are lavished on the company to eliminate risk. Those, of course, could be repudiated by a Labour Government making the company's position intolerable. For example, should the regulatory system be altered—as happened in the United States in the late 1970s—and the utility is obliged to absorb costs that would normally flow through to the consumer, all orders for nuclear power stations could cease to be economic. We recognise that at some time there will be a change of Government. Heaven forbid that that occurs on the next occasion or the occasion after that, but we live in a democracy.

I suggest to the Minister that the retention of the nuclear industry in a company with a franchise to operate granted to National Power could enable a package of nuclear assets to be assembled—within, say, a decade of flotation, when many of the major problems would have been overcome—and then a subsequent disposal arranged. In other words, it would be possible to segregate out of the

present Bill the nuclear industry or the nuclear power complex and defer privatisation to a later date. I am not against its eventual privatisation.

I would further draw to the Secretary of State's attention to the fact that the obligation to build an additional four PWRs of more than 1,000 MW each could embarrass National Power subsequently. Although National Power is being mandated to build four additional PWR power stations of 1,175 MW capacity each, the trend is for the construction of smaller conventional plant and smaller nuclear power stations of 300 MW. The use of the safe integral reactor devised by the UKAEA, Rolls-Royce, Stone and Webster and Combustion Engineering is probably much the best illustration.

It is an interesting speculation whether the £6 billion programme upon which the Government now insist by building Sizewell B and C, Hinkley Point in Somerset and Wylfa in Anglesey could be abandoned if later National Power were to challenge the programme on economic grounds.

There is also a serious risk to the nuclear industry. New technology apart, Britain cannot afford a gradual rundown of the nuclear industry in the United Kingdom due to inaction, economic erosion or short-term energy market considerations. The price of fossil fuels will inevitably rise reversing the competition cycle. I say that because the coal lobby is having a great success at present because coal prices are low compared to what they were 10 or 15 years ago. That situation is likely to alter dramatically. In that case, all the tribute would go back to the nuclear side. There are also certain matters concerning carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide that could cause nuclear power stations to be favoured.

8.15 pm

I will give an illustration of a lesson to be learnt from Sweden that appeared in the *Financial Times* on Thursday 22 February of this year. It said:

"Sweden faces the prospect of a doubling in the cost of its energy production as a result of the planned phasing-out of its nuclear power programme from 1995".

That is according to the country's state power authority's own estimates. That is rather significant. One cannot afford to ignore the possibility of that sort of thing happening.

The obligation for the generator to supply under earlier Acts is replaced by a series of contractual arrangements administered by the Director General of Electricity Supply, who in turn will monitor clause 30—that is the quota of non-fossil fuel electricity—and clause 31 on fossil fuel levy. The retention of a nuclear interest in a Crown company could facilitate and simplify those arrangements and more easily regulate the size of the nuclear industry.

I suggest to the Secretary of State that he bears this in mind. I understand that competition is the essence of the Bill under clause 3(1)(c) and that a broader basis of competition is now required. That could be effected with the emergence of at least three competing companies—National Power, PowerGen and British Nuclear. That development would not have to await the fruits of a decade of growth within the private sector.

Nuclear power could furnish the surplus capacity required to operate the privatised system. Both the Secretary of State and the director general are obliged under clause 3(1)(a) to keep the lights burning, which in turn implies the provision of significant reserve capacity to deal with shortfalls in electricity supply. Privatisation will require a much broader margin of capacity to operate the system than in a closely integrated structure. In the United States of America the figure is 33 per cent., in West Germany 50 per cent., and in Japan 49 per cent., as compared with about 20 per cent. in the United Kingdom. A Crown company would enable the Secretary of State to give a specific direction well in advance of likely shortages enabling the company and/or the nuclear industry to act as a "swing producer" for the system. The trouble with the contractual arrangements is that, although they may be subsequently litigated in the courts, they cannot guarantee immediate replacement or response, and a serious interruption in supply could occur. The citizens of New York have had some experience of that in recent years when their lights were extinguished.

It will be fairly obvious that to give a specific direction to any operator will be difficult under the Bill. Clauses 32 and 89 will take time to implement.

Mr. Ashton: It is clause 88, actually.

Sir Trevor Skeet: It is not clause 88, but clause 89. I shall correct the hon. Gentleman, who did not consider the Bill in Committee and therefore would not be expected to know very much about it.

Both clauses 32 and 89 will take time to administer and there may be procedural problems.

I do not want to take up too much of the House's time, but I must say that the idea of segregating the nuclear industry, temporarily at least, and keeping it in the state sector may appear to be an extraordinary idea to this side of the House, but there is a reason behind it.

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman should not bring his remarks to a close too quickly because the Opposition are an attentive audience. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will explain the relevance of his amendment to the Scottish nuclear industry, because he has spoken about the assets that will go the National Power. The hon. Gentleman correctly surmised at the start of his remarks that I am anopponent of the nuclear industry, but I recognise that technically the SSEB has a better track record than the CEGB. It is important for the hon. Gentleman to address his remarks and the relevance of his amendment to the Scottish nuclear assets.

Sir Trevor Skeet: I am obliged for that intervention, but the hon. Gentleman can make his own speech and I will make mine. The system prevailing in Scotland is rather different. How one approaches this matter rests on a question of understanding and judgment.

The CBI is thinking along exactly the same lines as myself as it has suggested that nuclear power stations should remain in state hands. The CBI and Opposition Members may have special motives for saying that—we all have different motives—but we are all searching for the truth. Some Labour Members cannot see the truth, but we are trying to prevent the Government from going straight ahead for the rocks and making problems for themselves. The Back-Bench Member can stand well back from the mountain and appreciate its height. Perhaps the Secretary of State, who is standing under the mountain, is in its shadow and cannot appreciate the height of the edifice. Therefore, it is up to us to point out some of the difficulties involved.

Because nuclear power was included in the Bill, probably against the advice of some of my right hon.

[Sir Trevor Skeet]

Friend's advisers, clauses 30 and 31 had to be introduced. They are hardly in line with market conditions, but one must attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. Perhaps the Secretary of State has done that. Perhaps he has been able to box the compass in every way and achieve his purpose.

The success of Governments lies in the support that they command at a given time. Provided that they get their legislation through, it is years before the mistakes are noted. If the Conservative party is in power in the future, it will say that an error was made now which certain Back-Bench Members tried to avoid. On the other hand, if the Labour party is in power, it will move from crisis to crisis. It will be faced with so many crises to surmount, that it will be unable to establish the conditions that preceded those crises.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that the CEGB—or Big G as it will be known—will ring-fence the nuclear industry, which will use the support of the main board and its experience? Therefore, to a certain extent, we shall have a separate nuclear industry. I have discussed this with the deputy energy Minister of the Soviet Union who is currently visiting this country. He told me that the people in the Soviet Union are extremely unhappy that the manufacture of nuclear energy and its regulation are all one and the same rather than those functions being separate. It is far better for the Government to regulate and for someone else to manufacture the power.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Our system is such that if one gets rid of a nationalised industry—I am glad about that because I support privatisation—one puts in its place regulations galore. There are so many regulations that an industry can hardly move.

Obviously things will settle down in future, but one must decide whether to have a plethora of agreements, negotiated between companies, or a national system with a small focal point. I prefer the agreement system, which I have witnessed operating abroad. We must be careful of some of the arguments advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce). Simply because the CEGB will ring-fence the nuclear industry does not mean that the industry will rid itself of liabilities. Such liabilities will be passed down, virtually into perpetuity.

When the nuclear industry experiences some of the additional costs passed on from British Nuclear Fuels from reprocessing and when, in the next 100 years, it encounters problems as a result of decommissioning—such problems are not apparent yet—it will be a good thing for it to be ring-fenced. Ultimately, however, the nuclear industry will remain responsible for the liabilities that may have been created. At a later stage those controlling the industry may have to go to the Government to say that the financial assistance laid down in schedule 12 is not great enough and that it must be increased by a separate Bill. Almost every year we have seen that happen with the coal industry as its borrowing power has increased. Exactly the same may happen with the nuclear industry, and we may end up giving it a vast subsidy to prevent it from going under. I am not suggesting that that will happen because the management is good and it will do its best.

As we pass through this period of great uncertainty, I would be much happier if we left the nuclear industry in the hands of the state. When we begin to understand and solve some of the problems, we will be able to go ahead and privatise and, on that occasion, the public will be behind us.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) on moving his new clause. When he described the purpose of his clause as protecting the long-term future of energy policy he unerringly put his finger not only on the weakness of this part of the proposal, but on the entire privatisation proposal.

Our amendment No. 160 is similar to new clause 3 as it seeks to take the nuclear industry out of the privatisation process. New clause 16 would oblige the director to publish the details of the difference between fossil and non-fossil fuels. Our other amendments relate to diversity of supply.

Surely when we debate the privatisation of the nuclear industry we debate the most remarkable and inconsistent element of the Bill. The nuclear industry will be privatised, but be subject to no competition. It will be sent to market without market forces. The consumer will be under an obligation to buy a fixed amount of electricity from nuclear sources and, for the privilege of being shackled in that way, pay an additional special tax on his bill. This is not so much privatisation as a rather crude form of economic gerrymandering. The privatisation of the nuclear industry is the achilles heel of the Bill because only a Government whose mind was so gripped by doctrine that they had completely banished common sense could contemplate as hare-brained a scheme as the one that they are entering into now.

Mr. Mans *rose*——

Mr. Blair: I shall give way in a moment.

The Government's insistence on the privatisation of nuclear power has dictated the terms of the privatisation throughout. It has been the driving factor behind the privatisation proposals. The proposed structure of the industry means that we will have Big G and Little G—70 per cent. of power stations in one company. The Secretary of State admitted to the Select Committee that that proposed structure resulted from the proposal to privatise nuclear power.

The Bill contains a special nuclear quota designed to protect the nuclear industry from competitive pressures because it cannot cope with the market as it is. There will be a special levy or tax on consumers to pay for the new generation of nuclear power stations that private investors will not undertake. When it comes to the decommissioning of existing nuclear power stations the taxpayer will be asked to underwrite the risk of existing nuclear power stations even though the profit from the industry has passed into the private sector. In short we have all the disadvantages of the private sector without even the one benefit it can offer from market forces.

As a result of our debate on new clause 3 and associated new clauses and amendments, we appreciate the dilemma in which the Secretary of State has got himself—it is a fairly incompetent position in which he finds himself. As he attempts to tell investors that the nuclear industry is an industry that can be sold, he offends consumers, but, as he attempts to placate consumers, angry that the industry is

being sold with them guaranteeing the risk, he of course offends investors. For that reason there is a contradiction written into the Bill between the idea of privatisation and the reality of the special ring fence to be built around nuclear power.

We know—not from a leak that emanated involuntarily from the CEGB but from one that appeared in the *Financial Times* last November that seems to come directly from the CEGB rather than indirectly as did some of later leaks—that Mr. Baker now believes that the new PWR programme cannot be justified unless the costs are underwritten by the consumer. Similar statements were made by Mr. Miller in relation to the Scottish nuclear industry. Since the Government have introduced a nuclear quota, stipulating that a certain amount of power should be bought from nuclear sources, and since only National Power—at least in England and Wales—can build new nuclear stations—the Government have left themselves in a position where National Power can demand that the costs should be underwritten by the consumer. In the provisions that they have introduced, the Government have effectively acceded to that request.

8.30 pm

On report, we are now hearing about the idea of a nuclear tax to pay for the additional costs of nuclear power —in particular, for the new generation of nuclear power stations. My hon. Friends will remember that that tax was at first denied by the Secretary of State. Then we were told that it had existed all along. Finally, in Committee, we received an admission from the Minister that, at present, it amounts to about £500 million a year, which is about 10 per cent. extra on consumers' bills. Even if all went well, it would be down to only 3·5 per cent. or 4 per cent. on consumers' bills by the end of the century.

The Secretary of State must answer the following question. Once this levy has been introduced, once the new generation of PWRs starts to be built by the privatised industry, what will happen if, contrary to the hopes of Ministers, the costs of nuclear power are greater even than the 10 per cent. extra that they now place on consumers' bills? Is there any limit on the levy or tax that will be paid?

The answer is, of course, that there is no limit at all. As a result of the structure introduced by the Secretary of State, we will be obliged to pay this nuclear tax, or levy, irrespective of what it adds to consumers' bills. Although at one stage in the proceedings, he attempted to suggest that the position would be reviewed by the turn of the century and perhaps then the levy could be taken off, it is difficult to see that happening when the levy exists in order to build a new generation of power stations that will exist well into the next century. The Secretary of State has locked us into a system whereby we have effectively given an open-ended commitment to fund a new generation of nuclear power stations without any ability to subject that commitment to the consumers' considerations.

Mr. Mans: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as we discussed in Committee, the so-called, possible nuclear levy exists largely to cope with ongoing costs of existing nuclear reactors which will be there regardless of whether the nuclear industry is in the public or private sector? If he is suggesting that existing nuclear power stations should be shut down, the cost to the consumer would be greater rather than less.

Mr. Blair: We shall hear from the Secretary of State whether the nuclear levy is there to pay for existing nuclear power stations. I have a different recollection of our Committee proceedings. The question was put time and again to Ministers about whether the levy covered new nuclear power stations that he wants the industry to build. The Secretary of State will tell us—and no doubt the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) will listen carefully—if it does not cover existing stations. I believe that the tax exists to fund the new nuclear PWRs.

We have learnt from the Hinkley inquiry that once privatisation takes effect, the key element on cost for this new generation of nuclear stations will be the rate of return on capital required by the private sector. The London Business School puts that figure at about 11 per cent., which is wildly uncompetitive with conventional fired stations. The evidence given to the Hinkley inquiry, which was not particularly contradicted even by the electricity board, was that once the generation of four stations which the Government want are up and running, that would add anything from £400 million to £800 million to people's bills.

Is it not fascinating to reflect on the distinction between the Government's case as presented at Sizewell and that presented at Hinkley. The world has finally been stood on its head at Hinkley. Rather than the building of new nuclear power stations being the justification of the nuclear quota, the Central Electricity Generating Board's evidence at Hinkley shows that the nuclear quota is now the justification for building the power station. The prime motive behind the building of Hinkley power station is said to be because they have introduced a quota system.

The question which the Government must answer—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) has raised it—is why the nuclear industry should be singled out for special legislative protection. Why does that industry stand alone to ensure that the Government's beliefs are realised? In addition, the proceeds of sale will be reduced as a result of the inclusion of the nuclear industry—that is probably where the Secretary of State and I share common ground. The CBI says that many of the City analysts believe that the proceeds of sale will not be substantially—if at all—increased by the inclusion of the nuclear industry. All these complex and complicated structures are the result of the Government's insistence on privatisation.

The Government accept that all these difficulties exist but they say that that is the only way to privatise the industry. They have not yet taken on board in this debate the fundamental point that, if the industry cannot be marketed without guaranteeing the risk of investors—which makes a nonsense of the idea of putting it into the market—the answer is not to market it and not to privatise it in any shape or form. That is the logical conclusion of the Secretary of State's proposal, from which the Government run away.

New clause 16 is reasonable. It says that it will be for the director to publish the difference between non-fossil and fossil fuels. That is entirely right for this, if for no other reason. We are told that nuclear power is uneconomic. The Hinkley inquiry is fought on a basis that has nothing to do with the economic case for that nuclear power station. Many of my hon. Friends will remember that for years we were told that the justification for nuclear power was that it was economic, and that nuclear power stations would provide us with cheap electricity. Given that record within

[Mr. Blair]

the industry, surely it is reasonable—as we suggest in new clause 16—that, if anyone should scrutinise the difference between non-fossil and fossil fuels it should be the director rather than the industry.

Will the Secretary of State confirm—I have heard that this is so—that the area boards wish to set up an organisation in order to implement the levy? The boards are thinking along the lines of a purchasing agency contracted to them or run by them in order to collect the nuclear levy. We would find that utterly unacceptable. If this is to be done at all, it must be done subject to the proper independent judgment of the director, who can look after the interests of consumers. His objective eye should be on the proceedings so that consumers can see exactly what is happening.

The final amendment in the group deals with diversity. It sets itself modest and, in my view, reasonable objectives. It obliges the area boards to consider the issue of diversity, which is the only case that the Government have left for nuclear power, but gives them freedom of choice as to how they meet that obligation. I believe—and I think that many of my hon. Friends would share my belief—that diversity, the argument now advanced by the Government for the new generation of nuclear power, is merely the latest in a long line of excuses for preferring nuclear at the expense of coal. The amendment accepts diversity, but provides a way of achieving it that is neutral as between different sources of fuel and does not put nuclear in a special, privileged position not occupied by coal, oil, gas and other industries.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Has not coal occupied a special, privileged position for the past 30 years because the CEGB has paid more for it than has been really necessary?

Mr. Blair: Exactly the same case could be made about nuclear power. What is interesting about the comments of Mr. Baker in the draft that came—involuntarily—from his office is his letting the cat out of the bag in disclosing that we are already paying a premium for nuclear power. Whatever money may have been put into the coal industry, the hon. Gentleman's argument applies in spades to what has been put into the nuclear industry.

The point that is germane to our present consideration of privatisation is why nuclear is being treated differently from coal. Why is one being made subject to the full rigours of the market and the other not? I believe that the argument about diversity exposes a weakness at the heart of the Government's case. The diversity argument is a very particular type of argument. It is a public policy argument. It is not an argument about market forces or about competition; it is an argument about long-term energy policy. That is what diversity is really about.

On inspection, the only argument for the fossil fuel levy with which the Government are now left is one that refutes the case for privatisation, because it assumes that markets cannot govern energy policy but must yield to the public interest. We may differ on where that public interest lies, but the fact that the Government are now driven to rely on diversity makes us realise that they are driven to accept the impossibility of running an energy policy simply at the behest of the market.

That is the difference between us—not merely on the privatisation of nuclear power or on the question of diversity, but on the case for privatisation itself. That is why, like it or not, when we support the new clause we are supporting the case for a long-term energy policy. We are supporting the case for market forces not to rule that policy. Ultimately, we are putting forward the case against privatisation, which is not in the interests of consumers, energy policy or the country as a whole.

Mr. Mans: I wish to speak mostly about the nuclear power industry.

It is clear, probably to both sides of the House, that there is a need for a variety of sources of power, not just generation from fossil fuels. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) would like an increase, if anything, in the amount of electricity generated by nuclear power, whereas I suspect that Opposition Members would like a reduction and would probably prefer the nuclear industry to wither on the vine as an alternative to fossil fuels in the medium and long term.

My hon. Friend gave a number of reasons for feeling that the nuclear sector should be kept public. He mentioned planning. Planning inquiries into nuclear power stations have indeed taken considerable amounts of time; for all we know, however, if we ever wanted to build a new fossil fuel power station in the future that, too, might result in a long drawn out planning inquiry. One thinks of the preliminary steps taken in relation to Fawley B, a new coal-fired power station which is not yet off the drawing board. Before the plan was scrapped it was already clear that the planning process might take as long as the Sizewell process, judging by the protests from that part of the country.

8.45 pm

At present, capital costs are higher for nuclear than for fossil fuel power stations, but the gap is narrowing due to the need to fit environmental devices to fossil fuel stations to meet the increasing demands of the environmental lobby in this country and elsewhere. While there is no doubt that fossil fuel power stations will continue to have an advantage in terms of capital costs, that advantage is bound to lessen in future.

My hon. Friend also made some relevant points about future investment in nuclear power and research and development. Interestingly, since the privatisation proposals were announced a number of new initiatives have been taken by those in the private sector, such as Rolls-Royce, getting together with American concerns such as Combustion Engineering to produce new schemes for nuclear power stations—perhaps, in some instances, smaller power stations. There is no evidence to suggest that, simply because of privatisation, research and development money will no longer be spent on developing nuclear generation of electricity. BNFL is already looking into feasibility studies on replacing the two Magnox stations at Calder Hall and Chapelcross, perhaps with a modified PWR design. That, too, is a private sector initiative and shows that there is a future for nuclear power in the private sector.

It is also worth mentioning that the running costs of nuclear power stations—as opposed to the capital costs—are certainly of the same order as those of fossil fuel power stations, if not cheaper.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman confused us all by suddenly referring to a series of power station proposals as

though they had emanated from the private sector rather than from the publicly owned nuclear sector. Will he clarify what he was talking about?

Mr. Mans: I cited Rolls-Royce as one private sector company—a privatised company, indeed—which is very much involved in discussing the production of smaller nuclear power stations, but that is just one example and there is already talk of similar plans in areas outside the CEGB. There is evidence that new initiatives are being taken as a result of the privatisation proposals.

One of the most significant points, mentioned only fleetingly in Committee, is that most of the nuclear power stations are right at the top of the merit order in which power stations are brought on line within the CEGB. That shows, if nothing else, that in purely running cost terms —as distinct from the capital costs of the new process—the generation of power by nuclear means is as cheap as fossil fuel generation. It shows that the nuclear industry has a future as an alternative means of generation in the private as well as the public sector. I therefore see no reason for it to be kept in the public sector.

I submit that in the future, with the increasing environmental restrictions on the generation of electrical power by fossil fuel means, nuclear energy will become a much more viable alternative. For that reason alone development should continue, and should continue in the private sector.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: This debate is an interesting one, and the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) is to be congratulated on tabling his amendment, which is remarkably similar to one that I tabled at the same time—indicating that there is some common thinking even though, as I freely acknowledge, we approach the problem from totally different directions. *[Interruption.]* No, I do not disagree totally. That is not the point at all. I think that the hon. Gentleman and I agree on one thing—that the Government have got themselves into the rather ludicrous position of trying to advance the argument of rhetoric—bringing the electricity industry to market and then having to force a rig into the market to distort it. The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North quite rightly says that this is a piece of nonsense. Why should not the Government operate more honestly, admit that there is a fix, take the nuclear industry out of their rhetoric, and leave the market to operate in the area of the electricity industry where it can more easily do so?

What I find interesting is that for 10 years of Conservative Government successive Secretaries of State have said, in effect, that the Government's policy on energy is not to have a policy. While the industry has been substantially in the public sector, there has been no policy, but now that it is to be privatised the Government have suddenly produced an energy policy—a policy which applies only to nuclear power. Nuclear power, we are told, is required for strategic reasons, but it is not fitted into a grand debate—we are not let into the inside thinking as to exactly what the Government's judgment of the strategy was. Certainly, it does not appear to have been produced by a radical reassessment of all energy options—weighing them up honestly and objectively, and then coming to a conclusion as to exactly where they might fit into a planned, or free market, or hybrid scenario.

We know perfectly well that from the outset the Government have begged every question, determined to have nuclear power. They knew that once they were committed to privatisation there was no possibility of making nuclear power stand up in the market place on its own merits, so they introduced this extraordinary Bill, which creates this distortion. Among means of generating electricity, nuclear power is given a unique, distorted and privileged position, which will disadvantage the consumer and other players in the electricity supply industry. That is why, on the question of nuclear power, the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North came up with a view similar to that of my colleagues and myself.

I think that it was last year, when the privatisation process was put in motion, that the Secretary of State said that the case for nuclear power would have to make itself. However, it could not make itself and it has not made itself, so the Secretary of State has had to introduce a fix in the Bill to take account of the inability of nuclear power to make a case for itself.

A number of factors need to be addressed. First, those of us who have a different view of energy priorities are at least entitled to argue that if we were allowed to determine which particular sector should be given a specific advantage it would not be the nuclear sector. It might be conservation. Certainly conservation ought to be the highest priority of this country, and it is one issue on which the Government can take positive action and make things happen. There could have been a decision to increase the use of natural gas—a much cleaner fuel, of which there is a great deal in the North sea. We could have made a very useful bargain with our Scandinavian neighbours. That would have been of substantial benefit for our medium to long-term energy requirements are concerned. Those options could have been pursued, but the Government did not even allow them to be explored because they had their own priorities.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is making a very interesting point. Does he agree that the Department of Energy was in favour of the Sleipner deal but that, for reasons of international finance, and because of the need to avoid the sort of trade deficits to which we are becoming accustomed, the Treasury opposed it?

Mr. Bruce: I do not accept that. Perhaps the Treasury knew something then that has only come home to roost now. There is no doubt at all that British Gas and the Department of Energy, left to operate freely, would have gone for that system. Indeed, if we had gone in early enough, when BP first mooted it, there could have been substantial benefits to the whole United Kingdom, both economically and in terms of energy.

It is interesting that the Government have decided that in one part of the United Kingdom—Scotland—there will be a separate nuclear company. Admittedly, it will not be an independent company but a subsidiary of the Scottish electricity companies. Nevertheless, the separation of the nuclear industry has been acknowledged as something that is tidy, at least in Scotland. The Government are therefore being somewhat inconsistent in not accepting that England and Wales, or indeed the whole United Kingdom, might benefit from having a single nuclear company.

As the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North indicated, the nuclear industry is facing a very uncertain future. It was quite interesting that the hon. Member, who is as strong and enthusiastic a supporter of nuclear power as I am an opponent of it, gave us a very substantial list of

[Mr. Bruce]

uncertainties, escalating costs, drawbacks and disadvantages. That that was from somebody who is in favour of the industry is an indication that serious questions have to be faced which the Government's Bill simply fails to address.

Certainly the cost has escalated. It has already been said today, and was said many times in Committee, that it is extraordinary that up to about two years ago we were told, in spite of the obvious information to the contrary, that nuclear power was the cheapest form of electricity available. Now we have been told that those of us who said that it was dear were right all along—that it was, and has been, the dearest form of electricity available. Throughout that time, those of us who said that it was expensive were told that we were entirely wrong. The consumer, in the Secretary of State's words, has been paying a nuclear levy —the high cost of nuclear power—all that time.

There are increasing problems for the nuclear power industry. First, the cost of reprocessing is rising at an unpredictable and rapid rate. Sellafield has been faced with threats of closure by the nuclear inspectorate because of its inability to meet acceptable safety and operating standards. A private industry which is dependent on reprocessing—that is bad enough, because it is expensive —also has to face the possibility of being totally paralysed if the only reprocessing facility in the country were closed down on safety grounds. The commercial risk of being bound into that system is clear. If I were asked to take that risk—as, indeed, I and all other members of the public are being asked—I should not want anything to do with it.

The problem of decommissioning is also creating uncertainty. That, too, is coming home to roost. The first nuclear power station is moving into its decommissioning phase. When we look back five years from now, I shall be interested to see what the actual cost of that decommissioning to date proved to be. The amount that we are told has been estimated and put aside is £300 million, but those who have been involved in decommissioning experiments in Canada have found that it costs many times that amount. Estimates suggest that the decommissioning of a significant nuclear power station may cost £2 billion—more than the cost, at current prices, of building one.

I accept that these are only ball park estimates by people who may not be totally unbiased, although the Canadians have had experience of decommissioning a nuclear power station. Nevertheless, it may prove to be substantially more expensive than has been budgeted for. The Bill provides for a substantial sum of money to be set aside for decommissioning, but the industry may find that the substantial amount of money to be advanced by the Government is inadequate. The industry faces considerable uncertainties, all of which could add substantially to the cost.

9 pm

The biggest problem of all that the industry will have to face is that of waste disposal. The costs and the practicalities of waste disposal cannot be fully quantified because no acceptable system for waste disposal has yet been devised. We must not take short cuts when dealing with waste disposal. It would be much better to store the waste on site in an area where it could be safely monitored than to transfer it to another site for reprocessing. The problem with nuclear energy is that, the more material one handles, the greater the volume of waste one creates. The industry must confront the problem, and the consumer and taxpayer will also have to face up to it. So must the shareholder. I hope that the Secretary of State acknowledges that.

We are told that the private sector is to be given the opportunity to exercise its commercial judgment in an uncertain market, and the Secretary of State tells us that it will do so far more efficiently than the public sector. However, shareholders are to be told that they will not have to take a risk. The Secretary of State should acknowledge that the shareholders will have to take a risk. The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North referred to the fact that the regulatory system is likely to be changed. It will almost certainly be changed. It will have to be modified in the light of experience. As and when the political complexion of the Government changes, the regulatory system will undoubtedly be changed. At that point, taxpayers are unlikely to be interested in providing substantial compensation for electricity industry shareholders.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North believes that at some unspecified time flotation may take place, but my proposal is the more honest way to deal with the industry. The Secretary of State's criticism of the over-centralisation of the Central Electricity Generating Board is legitimate, but it has been blurred by the need to create the fossil fuel levy, the non-fossil fuel quota and the nuclear levy. That has distorted the framework of the Bill. It would be in much better shape if at the outset the Government had taken the advice of the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North, kept nuclear power in the public sector, argued that there were strategic reasons for keeping it there and considered how to privatise the rest of the industry, which I accept is much more open to normal market forces and competition.

Furthermore, I would not privatise the industry until I had proved that a genuinely competitive industry could be created. That would be possible in other parts of the electricity supply industry, but the Government are privatising an industry that has built into it a substantial financial drag—the nuclear power industry. The Government have tried to ring fence it against risk and the foreseeable escalating costs that the industry faces, but they have been unable to take all the uncertainties fully into account. They will therefore find the City and the market less than enthusiastic about privatisation because it has not been thought through and properly worked out. The Government have created a monster which will return to haunt them.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): I hope that the House will not object if I intervene now to reply to the debate on the new clause and to speak to a number of Government amendments. After I have dealt with the new clause and spoken to the Government amendments, I shall listen to what is said about them and then reply to those comments.

The reasons for Government amendments Nos. 31 to 34 are straightforward. Under the present proposals, the nuclear obligation will be set once by order. We believe that that is too rigid. During the next 12 years, Magnox stations will be going off stream and PWRs will be coming on stream. However, it may not be possible to synchronise it so that, at any given moment, the amount of capacity

that is needed to meet the obligations is available. Therefore, we are amending clause 30 so that we place before the House orders that will recognise the practicalities. That does not represent any change of policy. Our intention is still to fix the obligation at 15 to 20 per cent., but we need flexibility for the reason that I mentioned. Power stations will be going out of commission while new ones are being built.

Another reason, which I believe the House will accept, is that we are aware that although we have set a non-fossil fuel obligation and wish to see renewables come on stream, at the moment there are no sources of renewable energy that could meet a significant part of that obligation. The distributors will be signing up to meet their obligations for non-fossil fuel.

We want to create a new tranche of capacity that is reserved exclusively for renewable sources of energy. We do not expect it to be very large between now and the year 2000. It will be between 200 and 600 MW. It is important to develop renewables. We want to have the right, therefore, to vary the order. There is no point in creating a non-fossil fuel obligation to be met by renewables if they do not exist. We want to have the right to modify the non-fossil fuel obligation to take into account the development of renewables and we shall be reserving a special tranche for that purpose. That is what the four amendments are designed to achieve.

I have listened with great interest to the debate. I mean no offence when I say that the arguments had a certain familiarity about them. We have been debating the subject at regular intervals for about three months. I shall repeat the Government's position. In particular, the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) grossly misrepresented the Government's position. The Government were elected on a commitment to maintain the nuclear power programme and to privatise the electricity supply industry. I have made it clear in every speech that I have made that we recognise that the non-fossil fuel obligation is a distortion of the market, but we believe that it is a worthwhile distortion, for these reasons.

We believe that security of supply is absolutely vital. We believe that diversity is the basis of security, and that has been my argument since the day I took office. I believe passionately that diversity of sources of energy is a vital part of ensuring the security of supply. In case there are hon. Members with short memories, may I say that we have had at least three major incidents in the past two decades which have underlined the value of nuclear—the two oil price explosions and the miners' strike.

Without nuclear during those three major incidents, this country's supplies of electricity would have been put at risk. I have said this before and I will repeat it because, although it annoys Opposition Members it is true: without nuclear during the miners' strike, Mr. Scargill would have won. So we believe that the case for diversity has been made three times and that it would be an irresponsible Government who did not learn from those experiences.

Mr. Blair: What about oil?

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) asks me to talk about oil and that is precisely the point that I am going to make now—the volatility of fossil fuel prices, even since this Bill was introduced. In the past six months the price of oil has moved from $12 a barrel to $20 a barrel, and there is no one who does not believe that in future oil prices will move gradually, inexorably and inevitably in one direction—upwards. So we need diversity of sources of supply to give us the necessary security.

We were elected on a promise to privatise and a promise to maintain a nuclear programme. We are determined to honour both those promises and also to make sure that those who benefit from diversity contribute to the cost; that is the reason for the non-fossil fuel obligation, which will enable us to meet both our commitments. It will enable us to privatise and it will maintain the nuclear programme.

Let me repeat once again a remark that I have made over and over again but which the hon. Member for Sedgefield simply cannot or will not understand. The non-fossil fuel obligation does not increase or decrease costs; it opens them up for public inspection. Now, for the first time, as a result of our proposals, the public is being told what nuclear costs are and it will have set out for it every year the difference, if there is one, between fossil fuel prices and prices of nuclear. So the Government are not in any way hiding the costs of nuclear. For the first time the public is being told what the costs of nuclear are.

Mr. Blair: The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) asserted that it was no part of the function of the nuclear levy or tax to cover the cost of the new pressurised water reactors. Does the Secretary of State agree with that?

Mr. Parkinson: I will deal with that point in my own good time. The point that I wish to make now is that nuclear costs are being incurred at present and that if, God forbid, we had a Labour Government tomorrow, the nuclear costs would continue to be incurred because we need the capacity that the present nuclear stations give us. So there would be no change with a change of Government, and the costs of nuclear would continue to be what they are—the costs.

What we are arranging to do is to expose those costs. So in 80 to 85 per cent., of the market we will have competition in the supply of electricity and in the 15 to 20 per cent. met by nuclear we will, for the first time, have transparency: people will know what they are paying for.

9.15 pm

What I find particularly puzzling about Opposition Members is that they continue to attack us for exposing the costs of nuclear and to defend a system which conceals them. At present, the cost of nuclear is wrapped up in the bulk supply tariff, and nobody knows precisely what it is.

Sir Trevor Skeet *rose*——

Mr. Parkinson: Whatever it is, every electricity user in this country pays it. It is being paid now and the fact that it becomes known and identified will neither increase nor decrease it.

Again, privatisation will not increase the nuclear component. In fact, ironically, for the first time the public is being consulted through Parliament about the level of nuclear provision. Were we not to have come forward with this Bill, it would have been declared CEGB policy to build four PWRS initially, with another five by 2003; so privatisation is not producing more nuclear power; it is exposing the costs of nuclear power and ensuring that the public, through Parliament, is consulted about the level of the nuclear obligation.

Sir Trevor Skeet *rose*——

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Member for Sedgefield gives the impression that somehow or other privatisation has put nuclear in a privileged position. Privatisation has put the first four PWRS in a privileged position, but the rest of the programme will have to be settled on is own merits by Parliament. The system that the hon. Member for Sedgefield and the hon. Member for Gordon defend would have imposed on the country a huge nuclear programme, would have wrapped up the costs in the bulk supply tariff —the plans are already made—and the public would have had to accept them on its own cost-plus basis.

Mr. Blair *rose*——

Mr. Parkinson: That cost-plus basis is the basis on which the public has had to pay for nuclear from day one.

So here we have a position in which the Government are prepared to declare their commitment to nuclear, prepared to reveal and justify the costs and prepared for the first time to tell the public what they are. Opposition Members defend a system which imposes these things on the public without consultation.

Sir Trevor Skeet: The Secretary of State makes some very astute observations. May I ask him a simple question on costs? What is the difference in cost to the state with the nuclear industry inside and with the nuclear industry outside the state system?

Mr. Parkinson: I will explain in a moment why I believe that, although there are difficulties with nuclear—and I do not deny them—even with those difficulties the nuclear component is far better in the private sector and that the country will be far better off having it in the private sector.

Mr. Blair: I want to correct the Secretary of State on one point. It is the most extraordinary drivel to say that the electricity generating board would have insisted on the nuclear reactors and that somehow the things are now up for choice. The Government have already made the decision anyway; the inconsistency is having made the decision by giving the ring fence of nuclear power and then putting it in the private sector. The Secretary of State has said that the nuclear tax covers these four PWRs. Supposing that the hopes on cost are wrong and that we find that those PWRs are considerably more expensive than conventional plant. Is it not the case that under his proposals the consumer will pay the difference?

Mr. Parkinson: The consumer always pays the difference, as he does under the present system. The difference is that those costs will be exposed and the cost of the electricity will be exposed, and if the public does not like those costs it will have a choice about whether it will pursue a nuclear policy. I believe that it will. I believe that the arguments for nuclear will become stronger and are becoming stronger day by day.

I mentioned the volatility of fuel prices. We are now seeing a growing world awareness of the dangers of being over-reliant on fossil fuels. We know about the greenhouse effect, the acid rain effect, the generally polluting effect of fossil fuel-produced electricity. I believe that the arguments will move firmly in the direction of more nuclear in the years ahead. But nuclear will not be imposed on an unwilling country as it has been in the past, by Labour Governments in particular. In future, it will have to justify its existence, after the four PWRs that we are committed to helping the industry to build.

I repeat that it is not privatisation that is ring-fencing the nuclear programme for the first time. The nuclear programme has been imposed on the country by successive Governments and we are maintaining the existing level. We are not increasing that level and we are not reducing it; we are simply maintaining it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), who wanted to keep the industry in the public sector, and the hon. Member for Sedgefield disagreed on just about everything else; there was not a single word in my hon. Friend's speech that the hon. Gentleman could really support. My hon. Friend suggested that keeping the industry in the public sector would help. I believe that that would be fundamentally wrong, and we have the experience of the past to prove it. The history of the British nuclear programme—a history in which the Labour party played a prominent part—is littered with appallingly wrong and bad decisions.

The AGR programme has been mentioned in the debate. We have heard a list of stations which were 18, 17 or 16 years late. That programme was imposed on the country by a Labour Government. They chose the wrong technology. They imposed it on industry. The programme was carried through in an appallingly incompetent fashion. There was a total lack of financial discipline and management.

Already, simply as a result of the threat of privatisation, we see a change in attitude. The CEGB is starting to drive hard bargains with its suppliers. Now that it is aware that it is no longer in a cost-plus position, the CEGB is talking to BNFL about not getting fixed price contracts and no longer being at the mercy of BNFL's cost-plus mentality. Why is the industry coming to see me to argue the case for help and protection? It is because it recognises for the first time that it will not be in a cost-plus position and that it will not be in the position, in which Labour Governments would leave it, and which it would be in if it were in the public sector, of being able to spend whatever it likes and passing the cost through. There is the beginning of financial discipline in an area where there has been none, and where there would be none if the programme stayed in the public sector.

Mr. Morgan: In the light of the disparaging remarks that the Secretary of State has just made about the AGR programme, if the CEGB and its successor company, National Power, were to propose not to operate the AGR stations that are coming on stream this year—Dungeness B, Heysham 2 and Hartlepool—and merely kept them in reserve so that they qualified under clause 30 as capacity available—if the nuclear levy could be reduced by not operating them but merely having them as reserve capacity —would the Secretary of State agree to that suggestion?

Mr. Parkinson: A very large sum of money has been spent on the AGR programme and we are now at the point of seeing improved performance from those stations. A substantial part of the expenditure has had to be written off, but it is now producing results, albeit 10 to 15 years late. Opposition Members ducked sharply when we pointed out that in one of those leaked documents, which were the only research that they seemed to do in Committee, the industry had announced that it would

have to write off £1,600 million of taxpayers' money because of the bad decisions taken exclusively by Labour Governments on the AGR programme.

We want to get the whole of the industry into the private sector. We want to get away from political influence and political impositions. We want to put the industry in the hands of commercial management. Even though there will be less competition in nuclear than we would wish, we believe that it will still be better managed, better off and more accountable if it is in the private sector.

We have heard some remarks about what the CBI wants. We have been told that the CBI wants a nuclear programme, that it wants it to stay in the public sector and then that it wants it to be floated off to create a competitive third force. My view is simple: what the CBI wants is the benefit of the security that comes from nuclear, but it does not want to make its contribution to the cost. Not only is the non-fossil fuel obligation a useful means of encouraging the development of the next generation of nuclear power stations but it is a way of ensuring that everybody who benefits from that diversity and security makes a contribution.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield asked how the system would work. I explained in Committee that there will be collective purchasing, through a company set up for that purpose, by all the area boards of the production from the nuclear stations. That production will be sold at the fossil fuel price to the area boards. If there is a difference and if the cost is higher than the selling price, that will become the levy, and that levy will be paid by all who use electricity. It will not be possible just to impose it on the domestic customer, which is what some people in industry argue for. The non-fossil fuel obligation will encourage the development of nuclear power stations but it will also ensure that the cost of those stations is fairly borne.

We believe that new clause 16 is unnecessary. It will be the director general who will compute the levy. It will be his job to decide the correct level of the levy and to publish it. It will also be the job of National Power separately to account for its nuclear production. That also for the first time will become transparent and people will know what they are paying for, but the director general will be part of the process of setting the levy; he will oversee it.

Amendment No. 148 proposes an interesting development. For the first time on behalf of the Opposition the hon. Member for Sedgefield recognised tonight the importance of diversity as a source of security, but in classic muddled Labour fashion. Having identified it as something desirable, they then make arrangements for it not to happen. They make a proposal for a vague system that encourages people to think about the possible benefits of diversity. We are not mealy-mouthed. We believe strongly that nuclear is the main source of diversity. As a result we are prepared to commit ourselves to justify our policies.

We noticed in Committee that the hon. Member for Sedgefield becomes remarkably coy if questions are addressed to him. When we ask him if he would close down the nuclear stations we get no answer. We point out to him that Cleveland Bridge is on the edge of his constituency and is very dependent on the nuclear programme; when we ask him if we may tell people there on his behalf that they will be out of a job, he looks coy, rushes off and talks to his journalist friends.

9.30 pm

When we got to questions of coal and Mr. Scargill, the hon. Member for Sedgefield handed over to his hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and made arrangements not to be in the Committee Room, so he was not there while the arguments about coal took place. I was there, and I witnessed the hon. Member for Sedgefield achieve the impossible—of being present, but not in the Committee Room, for most of the time. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is happy with his rhetoric and heated speeches, but we never find out in what he believes. We only know that he is opposed to privatisation, although we read in *The Times* that privatisation will stay and that the structure which we are putting in the private sector will remain for many years, because it will be a long time before there is a Labour Government. In any case, they would only tighten up the regulatory system. In other words, we hear a great deal about what is wrong with our proposals, but Opposition Members have no real plans for changing them. They would only regulate them a little, should they ever get the chance to do so.

We are asked, in connection with amendment No. 147, whether it would be appropriate for consumer committees to be involved in making the order setting the non-fossil fuel obligation. We believe that that is a matter for Government and Parliament—that it is for Government to make their proposals to the House, and we intend to do that. We do not think that local consumer committees would have a great deal to contribute to the setting of the non-fossil fuel obligation. That job is better done here in Parliament.

The House has had from the Opposition, and in particular from Labour Members, a typical piece of Labour escapism. They know full well that, in the nuclear programme we have, the nuclear stations owe much to policy decisions taken by them; they know that they cannot be closed; they know that we need them to ensure the security of the system; and they know the cost and object to the fact that we will expose the cost and argue the case for diversity instead of imposing it on an unwilling country. Nuclear has a great contribution to make. We are prepared to argue the case, to expose the cost and to have a transparent system.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North will change his mind about pressing his new clause and that my hon. Friends will join me in exposing Opposition Members as a bunch of bogus no-hopers who have nothing to offer but criticism.

Mr. Ashton: We have just heard a remarkable speech from the Secretary of State. He began by saying that the Bill was designed to take the decisions out of politics and allow costings to be made without regard to political issues, but immediately went on to make a political speech, using the need for nuclear power to slap down the National Union of Mineworkers. Nothing has been said in the debate so far about the part played by gas turbines or about the new EEC regulations concerning the surplus of gas in the North sea and its use for generating electricity. That issue has immense ramifications for my constituency and in particular for West Burton B, the proposed coal-fired power station.

About two years ago the right hon. Gentleman who is now the Secretary of State for Wales, then Secretary of State for Energy, astonished the House one Question Time

[Mr. Ashton]

by saying that he would approve the building of a new coal-fired power station, West Burton B, close to West Burton A, in my constituency. The CEGB, which we had been lobbying for at least two years, said that it was keen to have that power station because planning permission for it had been agreed and it could be built quickly. It was pointed out that West Burton A already existed, that the roads and railway lines were there, that it would be handy for the river and that it would be close to the rich coalfields of Nottinghamshire. Indeed, the CEGB said in a publicity handout that it

"would be planned to be in operation by 1995. It would be a large station with a generating capacity of 1,800 megawatts. Decisions have to be made soon because it takes about five years to build a coal-fired power station."

The then Secretary of State for Energy made his announcement a month before the general election. There were marginal seats in Nottinghamshire, there had just been a coal strike and there was much conflict between the NUM and the Union of Democratic Mineworkers. Today, more than two years later, not a sod has been turned or a brick laid. We continue to have only promises.

That power station was expected to create 2,500 construction jobs during the five years that it would take to build it. In my constituency there is 17 per cent. male unemployment in Worksop. A further 600 jobs were to be created in running the power station and many more running the railways, building a new road and even supplying fish and chips to the canteen. It was said that West Burton B would be given priority by the CEGB. It would have preferred Fawley in Southampton, but there were objections there because of property values. As there were no objections to West Burton B, it was agreed that the plan should go full steam ahead. All the councils agreed to the planning regulations.

Every time I have tabled questions to the Secretary of State for Energy about why he has not given his approval, he has said that there have been delays with the local councils on planning regulations, but the local councils agreed 41 out of 42 planning regulations very rapidly. The remaining one was whether a minor road should be straightened out before or after the power station was built. There has been no delay in deciding planning conditions for the power station, but we are still awaiting a decision.

The power station would keep five pits open. It would burn anything up to 5 million tonnes of coal a year. In Nottinghamshire, where the UDM supported the Conservatives throughout the miners' strike, the Conservative majority for the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), who is not in his place tonight, went up from 600 to 4,500 and the majority of my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) fell to 56. UDM members were promised continually that they would be looked after by the Conservative Government, and the promises continued until the last general election, but when it came to delivering those promises nothing happened. Since then there has been nothing but delay.

In desperation, I turned to the CEGB and asked Lord Marshall of Goring, "Do you intend to build the power station? Where do we go from here?" He wrote me a very friendly letter:

"Dear Joe . . . It is no longer our decision whether or not to go ahead with West Burton. There is excess gas in the North Sea and the EEC Regulations have now changed so that it is permissible to burn gas to make electricity . . . the options now include building coal stations or to build plant with combined cycles of gas turbines with steam turbines. At the moment I really have no idea what choice the Area Boards will make. In my opinion it is the answer to this question that will determine the future of the West Burton project, and the hesitation you see is not due to our final discussions on planning matters.

The Area Boards must give us a decision about the Fawley coal-fired station within the next few weeks, but it is only fair and realistic for me to tell you that I do not think we will get a decision from them concerning West Burton until a later date."

So the whole project is back in limbo. We were told that if there were a bad winter in 1992, the CEGB would have to have power cuts because it would not have sufficient capacity to meet demand. That was the urgency for West Burton B. Everyone knew that the Government did not want a coal-fired power station and would have preferred a nuclear power station, but they knew that it would take two or three years to get planning permission for another Sizewell or nuclear power station and there was already planning permission for West Burton.

So why is there a delay? I will tell the Secretary of State why I think there is a delay and I hope that he will come clean and tell us the real reason. I think that he does not want to saddle the new buyers of the electricity industry with a £1,000 million debt for the new coal-fired power station. He knows as well as we do that under the old nationalised industry, the CEGB used to run at 80 or 85 per cent. of capacity. It could not afford to run any higher or faster than that because if there had been power cuts because it was too close to capacity there would have been a political uproar and an outcry against the Government's mismanagement of a nationalised industry. But when the industry is sold off the private people can run it at 99 per cent. If there are power cuts and they have not provided enough capacity, they either import more from France to take the place of Fawley power station or say, "Hard lines, there will have to be cuts in consumption or electricity will go off at peak periods." They will be able to get away with that because the industry will be privately owned. New clause 16, which shows the difference in the price of electricity, must therefore be implemented.

Another factor may be that the buyers of the industry want a coal-fired power station but do not want such a power station burning coal at the present price. If they can delay the building of the power station for five or 10 years and in the meantime two new ports are built on the Humber—there is a Bill before the House dealing with that —they will be able to import cheap coal from South Africa, China, South America, Poland or elsewhere. That would make it more profitable. By that time, more pits in Nottinghamshire and south Yorkshire will have closed. That is probably the reason for the delay. The costings will be done again on the basis of cheap imported coal rather than whether, on present costings, coal is cheaper than nuclear power.

The Library research document says that clause 16 is most important. It offers a private supplier an escape if there is a power cut caused by circumstances "not within his control". That means that a heavy snowfall or excessive cold could be circumstances "not within his control" and there could be power cuts which might be disastrous for anybody dealing with a frozen food factory or freezers in houses. Yet in such circumstances the private supplier would be protected.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): The hon. Gentleman subscribes to the conspiracy theory as to why something has not happened, but could it not be that the generating authority is looking at combined steam and gas generation as it is likely to be cheap and much cleaner?

Mr. Ashton: That is the latest proposal as a result of EEC regulations. However, as Lord Marshall said, it is no longer his decision. When the Bill is enacted and the industry is privatised, as it will be in a few months, everybody can wash his hands of it and say, "It is nothing to do with me." For two years, the ball has been kicked from the Secretary of State to the CEGB and the local councils have been blamed. If the power station were to be built, five pits would be kept open. That power station should now be 2ft high and due for completion in 1992.

There is a financial consideration and many jobs are involved. We are talking about the future of the pits and of the area, but we cannot get a decision from the Secretary of State. He will not nod his head and say, "Go ahead." He wants to delay until after the Bill is enacted and the new ports are sucking in cheap coal. If he cannot give us an answer at the end of the debate, I hope that he will agree to meet a delegation from my local council and the coalfield community so that we can sit round a table and thrash this out rather than having to debate it in the House.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): It was startling enough to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) advocating retaining the nuclear element of the power generating industry in public ownership, but it was even more startling to hear some of the arguments that he put forward in favour of that proposition. I heard him saying, for example, that one of the key arguments in favour of retaining the nuclear element of the electricity generating industry in public ownership was the fact that in constructing nuclear power stations, cost and time overruns were frequently encountered. He mentioned Hartlepool power station, which took 19 years to build, as an example. I can trump that by mentioning Dungeness B, which took 20 years to build. My hon. Friend drew from this conclusion that the nuclear element of the power generating industry should be retained in public ownership.

9.45 pm

I draw the diametrically opposite conclusion—that it is about time such things stopped. No private industry could possibly countenance such cost or time overruns. State corporations can and do tolerate such inefficiency. It is about time that that was put to an end and I am glad that the Bill will do so.

While listening to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I noticed that there were 12 Labour Members sitting opposite him. Of those 12, no fewer than 10 represent coal mining constituencies. I looked across the Chamber and my eyes encountered the steely glare of my old adversary, the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), a miner himself for many years and an official of the National Union of Mineworkers. I looked along the Bench and saw the hon. Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and behind them the hon. Members for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Hemsworth (Mr. Buckley).

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Whom do you represent?

Mr. Irvine: I represent 68,000 consumers in Ipswich.

Another hon. Member who was present then, but who is not here now, was the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley). He had the distinction of being the chief administration officer of the National Union of Mineworkers form 1984 to 1987. In Committee, I called him the high priest of the mining interest and that was a fair description.

I make no criticism. Those Opposition Members are right to be here to represent their constituencies and to put forward the case for the coal mining industry. But we should remember that they have that particular vested interest at heart and that the case that they put forward, very properly, is the case of that particular vested interest. It is interesting to compare the scale of their turnout with the overall turnout of Labour Members.

Mr. Haynes: I am going to deal with you.

Mr. Irvine: I heard something of a threatening remark pass across the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that it was not an unparliamentary threatening remark.

Mr. Irvine: In my judgment, it was near the borderline, but probably not quite over it.

In his speech earlier, the hon. Member for Sedgefield asked why the nuclear industry has been singled out for special treatment. I can give him one very good answer, which is at the heart of the case made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Having a nuclear-generated element in the power industry means that there is that much greater diversity of supply. The hon. Member for Sedgefield said that the argument about diversity of supply was the only case that the Government had left. He said it in a derisory and mocking manner. Whether or not it is the only case is immaterial because it is a very good case and goes right to the heart of the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made the point that oil was subject to rapid price swings. He mentioned how, in the six months since the Bill first started on its way through the legislative processes, the price of oil had risen $12 a barrel to nearly $20 a barrel. That is a significant argument against relying too much on oil as a source of generating energy.

Coal has been just as erratic and dangerous a source of supply. During the past 20 years the generation of electricity in this country has been threatened by major strikes three times. The last one in particular was a highly politically motivated strike. The generation of electricity was threatened in 1972, again in 1974 and most crucially in 1984-85.

Therefore, it is entirely right and proper that while giving market forces due rein and producing the efficiency and the benefits that market forces can bring the Government should, in a very undogmatic, pragmatic and common-sense way, treat the nuclear element of the industry as a special case. It is absolutely right that it should be treated as a special case because it will add to the diversity of our electricity supply. Greater diversity of supply ultimately means greater security of supply.

Mr. Eadie: I understand that the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) made the same speech in Committee.

[Mr. Eadie]

Probably the only good thing about it was the advertisement that he gave to my hon. Friends' assiduous attendance during the debate.

I find it strange that the debate seems to have developed into an advertisement for nuclear power. I found it a bit rich when the Secretary of State decided to intervene to rubbish existing British nuclear technology and came out in favour of the PWR. We in this country have never had a PWR. As I have said before, we are building an American-British bastard version of a PWR, which has not yet worked. When we are talking about efficient technology and advertising nuclear power, I advise the House to look back at the history of nuclear power in all countries because when there is a new nuclear generator and a new generation——

Mr. Sayeed *rose——*

Mr. Eadie: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I should like to continue.

When there is a new nuclear generator, there is always trouble to start with. That will be the history of this exercise.

Mr. Mans *rose——*

Mr. Eadie: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish my point. I have only just started my speech.

I thought it a bit rich of the Secretary of State to rubbish British nuclear technology when we are taking the Westinghouse American type. They decided not to build any more, so it is a bit rich to put that defence.

I am trying to say that the debate has become a general advertisement for nuclear power. Just last week I read that the Government are so confident about nuclear power and thermal nuclear power that they propose to spend £20 million advertising it. It reminds me of the old ditty that I heard as a boy. It went something like this.

"The codfish lays a million eggs, the hen lays only one,
but the codfish doesn't cackle when its little stunt is done.
The artful hen we praise, the codfish we despise,
but every thinking man will agree it pays to advertise."

The right hon. Gentleman proposes to spend £20 million advertising a deficient case.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eadie: I want to make my speech, but I will give way. The hon. Gentleman has not been present for the whole debate.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I have not been here during the whole debate. However, if I remember correctly, the hon. Gentleman said that we had never built a PWR. Every nuclear submarine operating from and built by this country has a PWR at the heart of its generating system. They have worked safely for many decades. The hon. Gentleman should not forget that PWRs are effective and safe.

Mr. Eadie: Whatever qualifications the hon. Gentleman may have, he has no qualification in engineering.

Mr. Sayeed: That is quite wrong.

Mr. Eadie: I am astonished. I do not know where the hon. Gentleman got his qualification. He is talking about a little nuclear reactor in a submarine and comparing it with building a big thermal nuclear power station. It defies analogy. If the hon. Gentleman were to make that suggestion in an institute of engineering, he would be laughed out of the place. I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman.

My old adversary, the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), introduced this debate. I have great admiration for the hon. Gentleman. He is always diligent. Whether or not we agree with him, he always spends time and energy on his speeches. He has been here during the debate. The fact that he is absent now is no criticism. He has been present since 3.30 this afternoon. Perhaps he is having a cup of tea. In the course of the argument that he was trying to build, he said that he was searching for the truth. It is a search not for the truth but for the blarney stone. The hon. Gentleman used phrases such as, "Let us have temporary public ownership for a few years, at least until the difficulties have been overcome." He is pro-nuclear and anti-coal. I should have thought that someone of his experience who is pro-nuclear would understand the technical problems of nuclear power in the United States of America and in this country. The problems will not go away in three years.

The hon. Gentleman said also that the public are not ready. I cannot understand why the public are not ready. Perhaps they find it unacceptable that they have been asked to pay a high cost for this Bill. The hon. Gentleman considers that the Bill is in a state of crisis. New clause 3 could have a different title. It could probably be called the "Saving of the Privatisation of the Electricity Supply Bill". The hon. Gentleman was not confident that the Bill would succeed unless we had public ownership, as he described it, of the nuclear section.

We have talked about the nuclear tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the shadow Secretary of State for Energy, made his contribution in Committee and has made great play of that tax. I know that to some extent that has worried the Government, because it is getting home to the general public that, despite what the Secretary of State for Energy has said, they are paying a tax for nuclear power. It is what we describe as a blatant preference for nuclear power.

The coal industry has been brought into the debate, but what have been the arguments in favour of nuclear power?

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That at this day's sitting, the Electricity Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Question again proposed, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Eadie: All the arguments in favour of nuclear power have been torpedoed to some extent in the debate and at the various inquiries held. Two of the main arguments in favour of nuclear power were that it was environmentally more acceptable and that it was cheaper than coal, but we know that that is not true. The chairman of British Coal has said—I do not know where he obtained his figures, and various figures have been quoted in the debate—that there is evidence that in the immediate future the gap would be as high as 40 per cent. between coal and nuclear power. To some extent, therefore, the price argument has also been torpedoed.

It has been argued that environmentally coal is a very dirty pollutant, but that argument has also been destroyed to some extent. On a worldwide basis, coal is responsible

for about 15 per cent. of pollution, but in Britain it is responsible for half of 1 per cent. Hon. Members who talk about dirty coal and its polluting effects should put the matter into perspective. When I led a delegation from the miners' parliamentary group to meet the Secretary of State for Energy, one of the points that we made was that it was time that he stood up and defended coal. He is a custodian of the coal industry. It is rubbish to make out that coal is the main pollutant in this country. The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is not factually true. As the sponsoring Minister, he has a responsibility to defend the coal industry.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Eadie: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman as he has been here for most of the debate.

Mr. Stern: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with some incredulity. Does he agree that of the fossil fuels that are burned, coal is the greatest pollutant? In fact, if we are talking about atmospheric pollution, will he agree that however little—according to his statistics—coal contributes to atmospheric pollution, nuclear power contributes nothing?

Mr. Eadie: I shall come to that aspect. I begin to wonder when the debate will end, because the hon. Gentleman has tempted me. Incidentally, his figures are wrong and he should look at them again. I have looked up the figures. I have already given the main pollutants. Coal contributes 15 per cent. to the carbon dioxide elements of the greenhouse effect, gas contributes 6 per cent. and oil, primarily for transport, contributes 16 per cent., so coal is not the main pollutant. The hon. Gentleman should obtain the figures from the Library. He will then be able to inform the House that coal is not the main pollutant.

Mr. Stern: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eadie: The hon. Gentleman has had his opportunity and another hon. Member wishes to intervene.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The hon. Gentleman referred to pollution from the coal industry. He will be aware that the amount of nuclear radiation that comes from coal ash is far in excess of anything emitted from a nuclear power station. If the nuclear installations inspectorate visited a coal-fired station it would close it down if the same rules were applied as it applies to the nuclear industry. The hon. Gentleman mentioned 15 per cent. of pollution coming from coal-fired stations, but he did not answer the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) about the amount of pollution from nuclear stations.

Mr. Eadie: Again, it was a mistake to give way. The hon. Gentleman must look up the facts if he wishes to pursue such an argument. I hope that when the hon. Gentleman makes his speech he will give the source of his evidence as it is not factually correct.

We cannot draw a comparison between the environmental effects of the coal and the nuclear industry because they are not in the same race. Nuclear power is unforgiving technology, as we know from Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Windscale. We are told how good thermal nuclear power is and how well the Westinghouse PWR works, but some hon. Members know that in the United States not one such reactor has been built since 1974. When I was last in the States I was told that no one had any intention of building another such reactor because they were publicly unacceptable. Incidentally, I was also told that no one would build a PWR similar to the ones that we propose to build because they are technologically out of date.

The Secretary of State referred to security of supply. I have made many speeches in this House on that and coal must be considered in that context. Every station should strive to achieve security of supply.

We know that the oilfields of the North sea are now past their best. In the 1990s, production will decrease by 1 million barrels per day. Today it has already been said that in the 1990s the price of oil will escalate and that OPEC will be in a position to dominate the price of oil. In the 1970s we carried an annual burden of £5 billion due to the import of oil. Incidentally, since the Government took office 10 years ago, they have enjoyed £76 billion in oil revenues as a consequence of North sea production. On the latest available figures—I have not checked them—we consume more than 83 million tonnes of gas. That is equivalent to one third more than we produce, and the extra consumption will carry an import price.

I do not believe that the case has been made for treating nuclear power as a special case. The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North made a valiant attempt to save the Electricity Bill, but the Opposition do not want the privatisation of electricity. We believe that the Bill is a monster and that it will make the consumer and the country suffer. I hope that when we decide what to do it will not be just a question of public ownership of the thermonuclear power industry but that we shall return to public ownership of energy and a policy and strategy that will benefit the people of this country.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a brief contribution to the debate. I shall not follow completely the arguments used by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie). I was sorry that he chose to refer so slightingly to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) who comes to the debate as a naval engineer. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Midlothian had not researched that fact before he spoke as he did.

This debate is mainly about the best future for the nuclear component of the electricity industry. In the next few years, that component will undergo several startling changes. The first, on which we are already embarked, is the changeover in the principal method of production through nuclear means from the AGR to the PWR which, in itself, is a major change.

In addition, as the pace of change is accentuated—even in advance of the passage of this Bill—by the prospect of privatisation, even greater changes are taking place in the potential of the nuclear industry. The possibility of smaller PWRs and nuclear stations, designed to plug gaps rather than provide a base load, are being discussed for short-term use.

In recent weeks the physician's dream of the production of power by nuclear fusion has, hopefully, come one small step closer to reality. No doubt, as fusion becomes more of a possibility, its impact on the generation of electricity will become more marked.

I should like to refer briefly to a subject that I mentioned on Second Reading—the fact that the demands

[Mr. Michael Stern]

on electricity generation throughout the world will, in a short time, be infinitely greater than we have ever been used to. The mere fact that we in this country—like most of the developed nations—use 15 times as much electricity per person as many parts of the developed world, which want to accelerate their standards of living to somewhere closer to ours, will mean that there will be a demand for vastly increased electricity generation.

Anyone who believes that such vastly increased electricity generation can possibly come from the burning of fossil fuels can only be someone who believes that human life is designed to grow in ever hotter greenhouses. If we are serious about wanting to assist the developing world to achieve a standard of living which we find acceptable, we can help them only through nuclear or renewable sources of energy. There is no other alternative available. In the next few years we shall demand from the nuclear section of the industry rapid changes, merely to meet the demands of the rest of the world.

The new clause gives us a simple choice. Tremendous demands for change will be made of this section of the industry. Is that industry more likely to respond rapidly to change if it is in the private or the public sector? I do not think that even Opposition Members would argue that if an industry is retained in the public sector it will have the impetus to change and develop.

If the nuclear sector is to develop in the way that will be demanded of it in the next few years, we must give it every incentive to be ready to meet that change. It will have to take its place in a market and be responsible to the forces of competition.

10.15 pm

A second argument for the nuclear industry to move into the private sector as quickly as possible concerns marketability. It has been said several times, not least by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), that the nuclear industry will be difficult to market. I take exactly the opposite view. If we look at the various sections of the industry in terms of their attraction in a stock market issue, we find that we are looking at two rather different industries. The fossil fuel industry has a potential for high profit, but its profit can be greatly affected very quickly by environmental demands, regulatory demands of the EEC and the development of new and untried technologies such as the massive expansion of flue gas desulphurisation—or hopefully, at a later stage, fluidised bed combustion.

The non-nuclear end of the industry could be characterised, in marketing terms, as the sort of equity that would be very popular on the stock market among private investors but would carry high risk and high reward. The nuclear industry, as it exists at present, is a wholly different animal. Most of the costs that go into the profit equation in the nuclear industry have already been incurred: they are known. Therefore the nuclear section, particularly in its attraction for institutional investors, will be very much more in the nature of a gilt-edged stock. It is unlikely to show the same rapid changes in profitability as the non-nuclear industry; on the other hand, it is much more likely to produce a steady return for the investor.

I do not share the doubts of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North about the marketability of the nuclear section. I believe that it will appeal to a different section of the stock market, but appeal it undoubtedly will. On the basis that the industry must be ready to respond to change, and that that can result only from its being exposed to the forces of competition and profitability—and on the basis that the industry will itself broaden the appeal of the overall privatisation of the electricity industry—I hope that the new clause will be defeated.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): In his proof of evidence to the Hinkley C public inquiry last October, Mr. F. P. Jenkin, on behalf of the CEGB, listed no fewer than 28 reactors—mainly Magnox—which had elected to be decommissioned in the next 12 years. The bulk, incidentally, are to be decommissioned by the mid-1990s. The likely costs of decommissioning, however, are as vague in 1989 as the various proposals so far announced for physically dismantling nuclear stations and disposing of their constituent parts.

The operators of nuclear power stations are required to make provision in advance for the cost of shutting them down, but a recent survey by the *Financial Times* energy economist suggests that they are planning that provision on the basis of very limited evidence, and that they are likely to find their funds insufficient to meet the actual cost. The utilities have recently calculated that cost on the basis of 10 per cent. to 20 per cent. of the cost of building a new station. With the cost of new reactor capacity running at around £1·2 billion per 1,000 MW, that conservative calculation represents a substantial sum. The SSEB, for example, estimates the cost of dismantling its two Hunsterston B reactors at £270 million in 1992 values.

If we give the utilities the benefit of the doubt and take, as an average per plant, a figure of just £200 million for decommissioning, the 20 reactor sites to be decommissioned by the year 2,001 will involve expenditures of no less than £4 billion. If, as is likely, the decommissioning cost is nearer £300 million per site, the global cost hovers around the £600 billion mark. It is little wonder that the majority of Government Members want to dump responsibility for that decommissioning in the lap of somebody else. But the responsibility cannot be dumped—the decommissioning process will affect us all, whether we like it or not, in the same way as we all share responsibility for the burning of hydrocarbons and for the detrimental effect on the environment of doing so without proper technological safeguards.

Some of the proposals for decommissioning nuclear power stations are barmy enough to make even the Secretary of State's hair curl. Recently, I read a paper by a group of West German nuclear engineers. It advocated that, once fuel rods had been taken from the reactor core, they should be replaced by high explosives, and that controlled explosions should take place in order that a new generation of robots might go into the reactor core, pick up the fragments of irradiated material, and drop them into little lead-lined sacks. The robots would then come out of the reactor. It would be dismantled in that fashion.

It seems to me that the industry simply has not thought this problem through. The Government are attempting to make sure that they get out of the situation so that they will not have to take responsibility for it. That is not good enough. They assume that they can substitute the effects of the free market—that, somehow, a magic wand will be waved and that everything will be all right once privatisation has taken place. I should like to draw the

attention of the Secretary of State to reports that the Chinese are negotiating for South African coal, despite the fact that British Coal is now the world's largest importer of Chinese anthracite because it closed down virtually all the anthracite mines in South Wales. The Chinese are so desperate for coal that they are willing to shop around and buy it from other countries at the same time as they export subsidised coal to break the coal industry of a potential customer—namely, us.

A free market in energy does not exist, and it never has existed. Energy has always been right in the cockpit of politics, and it always will be there whoever controls the sources of energy in the 21st century will have political power as well as economic power. It seems to me that the Government are trying to dump responsibility and make a fast buck. That is what it is about. To quote a former distinguished member of this House, we are selling the family silver for short-term gain. That is a disgrace—a disgrace in terms of safety, in terms of the health of our children in the future, and in terms of those children's inheritance of a sterilised coal industry.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I did not plan to speak, but I listened with great interest to information being abused by the Opposition and thought that I should say a few words about the rather strange notion of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet)—for whom I have great respect—that somehow, by keeping the nuclear industry within government, we would be protecting the public and doing the best job for the nuclear industry.

We in this country started off with a Magnox programme. We built some 20 stations, every one of them different. So many of the decisions as to how we would build them, where we would build them, and the different equipment that would go into them were examples of Ministers putting their sticky fingers into decision-making. Of course, we know well what happened when there was a decision to be made under a Labour Government. The AGR technology was unproven; the pressurised water reactor technology was well proven, and was going through in the case of most of our competitors; and there was the steam-generating, heavy water reactor, in respect of which, I might point out, I have the honour of representing Winfrith, which had the only model of that type. We decided to go for the advanced gas-cooled reactor. We learned to our cost that that was a very expensive route to follow.

We toyed with fast breeder reactors, but we decided to soft-pedal on that type of reactor. I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) say that Britain has no experience of pressurised water reactors. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) pointed out, having been in the Royal Navy, that we have built and run over 20 of those reactors and that we have done so extremely effectively. If an organisation decides to go down a particular technology route—as the Royal Navy did—and to stick with it, it can be most effective.

France adopted a technology and then refined it. By investing an amount equal to £20 billion, it is now able to provide the cheapest electricity in Europe. *[Interruption.]* No, Electricité de France is not in debt. Moreover, France is exporting electricity to this country, Germany and other countries. France generates more nuclear power than it needs.

We have suffered from constant changes, influenced by Government policy. That is why our nuclear industry is in such a mess. One wonders, therefore, why the South of Scotland electricity board has been so successful. It runs a small number of nuclear power stations. However, the board was sensible enough to look at other people's technology—for instance, at the CEGB's technology—and pick the winners when the bugs had been taken out of them. The SSEB's nuclear power programme provides cheap energy which has benefited Scottish industry.

The European sector of the Soviet Union is running out of cheap coal. It has made the decision——

Mr. Morgan: Perhaps I could correct what the hon. Gentleman said a few moments ago. Electricité de France has made a loss. *Power in Europe* of 30 March says:

"EDF slipped back into the red last year."

Mr. Bruce: I stand corrected on that point, but that is only one year. After all the money that has been invested in the coal industry to ensure that bulk supplies of coal are produced for our electricity industry, it would be hard to argue that we are making a profit out of the energy industry.

The European sector of the Soviet Union has little cheap coal now available to it, so it has decided to build 36 large pressurised water reactors. The Soviet Union is asking Britain to help it to design safe pressurised water reactors.

Before the Secretary of State introduced his proposals, the CEGB said that nuclear energy was cheap. Many people have referred to the fact that before the break-up of the organisation was suggested the CEGB said that nuclear energy was cheaper than any other form of energy. By fair means or foul, it has now made sure that in the Bill the Secretary of State provides compensation if nuclear energy, when it is properly costed and put into the system, is found to be more expensive than other forms of energy. One can imagine why National Power has taken that view: it is the only organisation that currently has large-scale generation from nuclear power, and so it is looking for some guarantees from the Government. But I also understand why it has great problems with the way in which nuclear power is to be costed. We in this country have failed to make the decisions that we should have made on a number of matters, particularly on waste disposal.

10.30 pm

We were told some years ago by Nirex that the shallow burial of nuclear waste was a sensible, economic and safe means of keeping the waste out of harm's way. One must remember that this particular type of nuclear waste has been stored for 20 or 30 years in prefabricated asbestos or metal sheds above ground in encapsulated tubs, and that we have all felt very safe about that. Bradwell, which did not want a shallow nuclear dump, has had a shed filled with nuclear waste for years. I have one in Winfrith; anyone who has a nuclear power station has one of these sheds, where we have stored safely for up to 30 years intermediate and low-level waste.

Unfortunately, the Government have been pushed—possibly by people's fears, which have been whipped up by Opposition Members—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—into proposing such an incredible solution as burying this type of waste under the sea.

[Mr. Bruce]

We also have the problems of decommissioning. When Magnox stations were built, it was clear, before we built them, how they would be decommissioned: people would remove all the parts that could be removed, take out the very radioactive material—the fuel, and so on—which would be taken away for reprocessing, and the inside of the nuclear reactor, which would be only marginally radioactive, would be inside a large shield, purpose-built to keep it in, even when it contained very radioactive material, and would simply be buried in a hill. That is the cheapest and most sensible way of getting rid of a nuclear power station.

The amount of radioactive material left in a pressurised water reactor will be even less, and these reactors will be even easier to deal with. To want to break the reinforced concrete shielding at Sizewell, in order to take away a small amount of radioactive material when the life of the power station is at an end, is totally mad. Why not have the highest hill in Suffolk, simply by covering it over and leaving it? That is the best and cheapest way of getting rid of it.

Again, National Power will be worried about the costs of having to reprocess.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Bruce: I must get on.

It will be worried about reprocessing fuel that has no use. We have said in the past that we were reprocessing this fuel because we would run out of uranium which we would need for fast breeder reactors. The Government ought to look at what is to be done with the fuel. Magnox fuel needs to be reprocessed because it is unstable in its unreprocessed state, but the fuel from AGR and PWR reactors could be stored without reprocessing.

The Government must therefore look at the cost of waste disposal, the cost of decommissioning, and the cost of reprocessing and perhaps see that as the way to control the additional costs that may or may not come through in nuclear power. I believe that we have an opportunity to do something about costs while we are selling off this part of nuclear generation, because on-going costs of nuclear generation are lower than those of any other fuel; that is why they are left on as base load in all our power systems. By selling these power stations at a price that the market believes they are worth rather than at the cost of building them, one can get an economic cost for the operator to operate them at the price the shareholders paid for them rather than the price that the CEGB paid for them. In that way the market could decide the best economic rate for running the power stations.

New power stations will show on an economic basis that they can be cost effective. The two organisations currently licensed to run nuclear power stations—the Atomic Energy Authority and BNFL—are considering the possibility of going into partnership with private companies. That demonstrates graphically that when decisions are taken away from the monopoly supplier, the CEGB, other people want to get into nuclear power generation. I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would address a few remarks to how he sees power stations being run effectively by the Atomic Energy Authority or BNFL if they eventually get into private hands.

With the use of present technology, the private approach will mean that nuclear power will be generated far more cost effectively than before. The same efficiency that the CEGB has demonstrated in running coal-fired stations, which provide 80 per cent. of its production, will be shown in a group of nuclear reactors which will have to come inevitably because we do not have an unlimited supply of coal. The economic cost of taking coal from the ground will get higher and higher, while the cost of nuclear energy will get lower and lower.

Mr. Hardy: I will try not to respond at length to the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) but some parts of his speech cannot pass unremarked. His was the first reference today to cheap French nuclear power. We have shown over the last three or four years, after listening to a succession of Conservative Members in previous energy debates making the same point, that it is unjustified. Electricité de France is the largest single corporate debtor in the world. It is sustained by the French Government because they are determined to ensure that it corners the market and supplies heavily supported nuclear power to keep French industry in a competitive condition.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to Polaris submarines. I thought that at one point he was about to suggest beaching them all in order to provide new little top-ups. If they were privatised as well, they could be used to serve the spot market in power stations, as was recommended in Committee.

I do not want to respond further to the hon. Gentleman although I think that his speech was the first of the penal sanctions that will be taken against the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet). The hon. Member for Dorset, South gave the credit for the decision to reverse the Nirex clay bed burial proposal to the Opposition and not to the three Conservative Members who were instrumental in changing that decision just before the election.

I want to compliment my hon. Friends on their comments. My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) echoed the Secretary of State's concern for priority for security of supply. The Secretary of State joined us only on rare occasions in Committee. He never finished a speech that I interrupted on a point of order before we finished one day. I do not think that we saw him in Committee after that. However, the Secretary of State is right to serve the priority of security of supply. The only difficulty is that he seems to see security only in the nuclear context. If he was really keen on security of supply, and if he was really in pursuit of diversification, the Government's record on energy efficiency would be more commendable. Our Government's record is the worst in the civilised world. The jobs which would have accrued had we copied the other countries of northern Europe would have made a substantial genuine contribution to reducing Britain's unemployment figures.

Some people believe that hon. Members who represent coalfield constituencies have only the interests of the coal industry at heart. Obviously I have. I am sponsored by the National Association of Colliery Overmen, Deputies and Shotfirers and I have a mining constituency, although it is much less a mining area than it was three years ago. There are more redundant miners in my constituency than there are people working in the coal industry. The number working in the industry is shrinking and could shrink to a dangerous level before long.

We must have diversity and give a higher priority to energy efficiency and conservation. At the same time, if the Secretary of State is sincere in his pursuit of security of supply, he must resist the blandishments of some of his hon. Friends and pay attention to that small band of Conservative Members who agree with our view and who are worried lest we develop a dependency on imported coal.

At present—the Under-Secretary of State knows this, even if he will not say so with the clarity that the situation requires—we are in a buyers' market in the world coal trade. But add 10 million tonnes, let alone 30 million tonnes, to the increased demand for coal in that market, and it will rapidly transform from a buyers' to a sellers' market, and I think I see the Under-Secretary nodding in agreement. That transformation could occur rapidly. Indeed, because of the antics of some people who cannot see further than the end of their noses, in the coming few years the British coal industry could be reduced to a tiny rump. Then we would not be able to meet our demand for coal and we would have to buy as world coal prices rise.

Today, world coal is available at $3, $5 or even more per tonne less than the cost of production at the colliery, before transport costs are incurred. It would be stupid for us to develop a reliance on imported coal while it is cheap, discounted and offered at a dumped price.

The action of the Government is not that of pure dogmatism. It is the action of an Administration who are worried about the level of trade deficit and international indebtedness. They believe that one answer to that problem—an answer which is also comfortable in a party political sense—is to rattle the begging bowls around the world and to dispose of an industry on the cheap, thereby creating problems, some of which we have mentioned in this debate, which the Secretary of State hopes will go away. If the right hon. Gentleman's first priority is security of supply, he cannot maintain the posture which dominates this part of the Bill.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North has provided us with an opportunity to discuss these issues. He appreciates, as do my hon. Friends and I, the way in which the research and development base in Britain is declining. He was right to express anxiety about that. Indeed, in 10 years time that may appear to have been the most important part of his speech. We are relying on others' research. Our nuclear programme demonstrates that we have turned our backs on some difficult and costly decisions. It seems to me that we are developing a dependency not merely on other people's research and other people's money but on other people's coal.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is my hon. Friend aware that Mr. Malcolm Edwards, giving evidence to the Select Committee on Energy, said that, because of the Government's refusal to find £11 million to continue the research and development of the fluidised bed at Grimethorpe, it may have to be discontinued? If that happens thare will be very little research and development into such schemes.

10.45 pm

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted that my hon. Friend raised that point as it answers many of the comments that we have received from Conservative Back-Benchers. We are in favour of research and development in support of the environment for which the Prime Minister occasionally expresses some sympathy. If that research were to founder, the Government would be acting with the most abject irresponsibility.

When Conservative Members spoke at their counts after the last general election, they did not merely thank the 25, 30 or 35 per cent. of their electorates that voted for them, but made the point that they would be representing all the people in their constituency. As that obligation exists for every individual Conservative Member, surely the Government must accept that their responsibility is national and is not merely to the City of London and to the affluent and favoured areas of these islands. They should understand that they have inflicted on many communities in coalfield areas, particularly in the past three or four years, dereliction and devastation, the dampening and destruction of hope, the slaughter of jobs, the depression of wage rates and the creation of an environment which, unless something is done very soon, will cause further dismay and destruction.

For example, we still await decisions about derelict land grant. For the Government to embark on a further round of job destruction and annihilation—*[Interruption.]* It is no good the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) smirking. These islands are too small for the regional differences which he views with equanimity. It is time that he understood that hon. Gentlemen representing areas as far from the coalfield as his constituency are beginning to worry about the differences between one part of the country and another which are daily being exacerbated.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hardy: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman spoke for a long time and uttered a lot of nonsense and is not going to interrupt my concentration.

These islands are small and while hon. Gentlemen can happily engage in short-term calculations with no long-term wisdom whatsoever, in importing coal and destroying our communities, it would be not merely injurious to the Secretary of State's first priority, which is security of supply, but that short-term folly would bring about utter destruction and injury to our constituents. If Conservative Members resent our making such points because we come from the coalfields, that does not mean that our arguments are unjust or invalid. Our arguments have a great deal more wisdom than some of the points raised by Conservative Members. It is certainly time that the Secretary of State recognised that enough damage has been done and that further risk should not be incurred.

Mr. Beith: I shall concentrate on what the Secretary of State said. First, I acquit him of the charge that he played no useful part in Committee. At least he was on the Committee, which is more than can be said of the Secretary of State for the Environment in respect of the Water Bill. The Secretary of State illuminated some of the contradictions in the Bill, sometimes deliberately and openly, sometimes by accident, but he made a valuable contribution to the Committee and I do not agree with the charge that he did not.

I also agree with the key aspect of the Secretary of State's analysis of the industry now. The present system is indefensible. It has allowed the industry, as a monopoly supplier, to make decisions about investment without any real regard for the return on the investment or the cost to the consumer. The Labour party would have perpetuated that system in an even worse form. I have vivid

[Mr. Beith]

recollections of what it had in mind. It wanted to create a single nationalised monolithic industry under the leadership of Sir Francis Tombs, who has a greater reason than anyone not to vote for my party as it was I, with my late friend David Penhaligon and other colleagues, who refused to allow that proposal to pass during the Lib-Lab pact. Sir Francis Tombs thus never became the head of the single nationalised monolithic electricity industry that the Labour party preferred, although he has managed to carve out a lucrative career elsewhere. That system would have been even more damaging than the system that we now have. The current system has produced colossal excess capacity, especially in Scotland. The South of Scotland electricity board has more than double the capacity that it requires on the coldest day of the year.

The Secretary of State has failed to follow through his analysis in the shape that he is creating for the industry. He is in a ludicrous dilemma. He claims to be creating a market system for electricity while shielding nuclear power from that market. He is engaged in ensuring that shareholders do not take any risks. How can a market system work other than on the basis that shareholders have to take risks with their capital and are therefore concerned about the level of risk? The purpose of the Bill is to protect shareholders from any of the risks of investment in nuclear power. That is the contradiction at the heart of the matter.

The Minister referred to the two manifesto commitments that he and his colleagues made—to privatise electricity and to retain a substantial nuclear power industry. When they made those commitments they did not realise that they were incompatible. That discovery came later but the Minister and his colleagues decided to plough on and try to do both. They should have changed their minds and recognised, as we did long ago, that the protection and feather-bedding of the nuclear power industry is against the interests of the consumer.

The Minister criticised the investment decisions that were made in the past, but he and his colleagues did not oppose them at the time. When Labour Governments made crazy investment decisions, my hon. Friends and I were described, often by Labour Members, as the brown bread and sandals brigade because we objected to the absurdity of those decisions. Now the Minister, too, realises how absurd some of those decisions were, yet he has created a system in which such decisions can still be made—a system in which the disadvantages of nuclear power will be paid for by the consumers without any choice on their part. There is a higher cost and an incalculable level of risk involved in nuclear power. We all know that, although the risks of nuclear power are statistically smaller in incidence, they are incalculably greater in terms of the character of what is involved, as we all saw in the Chernobyl incident.

I shall not go into the many other problems with nuclear power, but one pressing problem that has been pointed out in some of the speeches today is the dependence on the creation of more green field site nuclear power stations. They are then sterilised for 100 years, for the reasons given by the hon. Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce). All that is built into the Government's privatisation plan instead of being exposed to the market considerations to which they attach such importance.

When the Secretary of State talks about diversity of supply, why does he not look at the energy efficiency and energy conservation side of the problem? It is argued that the amount of expenditure involved in building one pressurised water reactor would yield many times that saving in output if it were invested in energy efficiency and energy conservation. If there is a danger that we may have insufficient power in certain circumstances, such as those of the miners' strike which the Minister described, we could take the precaution of investing in more efficient use of power and less use of power in some areas in which we are profligate with it now.

The Secretary of State sought to argue that the Government were being open about nuclear power and bringing about a situation in which we could make real choices, but I am profoundly worried about what will happen at future public inquiries on nuclear power stations, such as could take place in my own constituency because of the Druridge bay proposals. It will be argued that all the planning considerations must be swept aside because Parliament has decreed that there has to be a non-fossil fuel quota, so we have to have that and other nuclear power stations. There will be a distortion of the decisions in which local communities seek to be involved as they argue the case against nuclear power. We have seen signs of that already at the Hinkley Point inquiry and the provision may prove to be the destruction of future public inquiries into nuclear power.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) has gone to the heart of the illogicality of the Bill, arguing cogently that, if nuclear power is to be ring-fenced and singled out, as he wants it to be, it should remain in the public sector at least for the time being. I do not want it to be ring-fenced and protected, but I accept the logic of his argument—that if that is to be so, the place for the industry is with the Government, who are imposing all these conditions to protect it. It is significant that the examples produced by Conservative Members of the new interest in diversified nuclear power generation came from the public sector. They were drawn from the Atomic Energy Authority and British Nuclear Fuels plc, both of which have shown interest in nuclear power generation and both of which are in the public sector. As public sector bodies, they are putting forward such proposals on the basis that they would have a guaranteed return.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The reason why the Atomic Energy Authority wants to go ahead with research into a small, integrated reactor is that private enterprise, not the Government, will provide the funds to carry out that research and build that power station.

Mr. Beith: That is only because its shareholders will be protected to the ludicrous extent provided in the Bill. It is as though a Government about to introduce a breathalyser announced widely that a previously unknown device was to be required by police forces all over the country and that any company which decided to manufacture them would have its shareholders protected from any risk that its particular version would go wrong. The Government are creating the market and protecting the shareholders who go into it. That cannot make sense by the Government's own standards, and it makes no sense by ours.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I want to outline some of my criticisms. I support the proposal to keep nuclear power in the public sector and my main concern is

with nuclear safety. Since Chernobyl, the British public has become aware that nuclear reactors can go badly wrong and completely out of control. In the 1960s and 1970s the industry used to argue that so many fail-safe systems were installed in reactors that they could not go out of control. But they can and not merely once in every 1 million or 1,000 million reactor years, as the industry would have us believe.

We have had two major catastrophes, at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, in 3,000 reactor years of experience. The statistics show that reactors will go wrong once every 1,500 reactor years. That means that if we build a pressurised water reactor with a design lifetime of 40 years at Hinkley Point, there is a one in 40 chance that it will become a Chernobyl or a Three Mile Island—and that goes for every pressurised water reactor that we build. The safety of nuclear reactors must be paramount and I am certain that the British public feel that they will be run more safely in the public sector than in private ownership, where a profit will be sought.

Once the industry is privatised, there is no question but that de-manning will follow. There will be pressure to cut the number of staff. Curiously, nuclear power stations are labour-intensive. For the same power output, nuclear power stations employ twice the number of staff of fossil-fuel power stations. Therefore, the pressure to shed staff will be all the more severe in nuclear power stations and that must mean compromises on safety.

11 pm

I shall be brief because of the time, but I too have strong reservations about decommissioning, nuclear waste and about the fate of the plutonium recovered by reprocessing. With decommissioning, we are talking about a time scale of 100 years or more. When we remember the time scale it strikes me as irresponsible to hand to private industry the important task of decommissioning.

The same goes for nuclear wastes, which we must keep from the environment, not for 100 years but for hundreds of thousands of years. Again, it is the height of irresponsibility to pass the safeguarding of such wastes to the private sector. Under the Bill plutonium will become private property. About 20 tonnes of plutonium will be handed over to private companies.

I turn now to economics and echo some of the points made earlier by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) when he moved his new clause. What exactly will National Power be buying when it buys the nuclear industry? Well, it will be buying 10 Magnox reactors and five advanced gas-cooled reactors. That is the bargain. Of the 10 Magnox reactors, Berkeley is already closed, Hunterston is due for closure and the other eight will all be closed during the 1990s. The Magnox reactors are a fleet of old crocks. That is what is being sold off.

We heard the Secretary of State himself make critical comments on the AGR programme. Dungeness is a legend on its own. It took over 20 years to build. Three of the other five AGRs are clearly performing poorly. They are lame duck reactors.

The proposal to build four PWRs is a speculative venture because they are large reactors and their future economics is uncertain. The City of London knows that nuclear power is uneconomic. The figures that we received in Standing Committee from John Baker of the CEGB showed that at 5p per unit nuclear electricity is 40 per cent. more expensive than electricity from coal at 3·5 pence per unit.

It is clear that nuclear power is the Achilles heel of the Bill. There is the danger that, in the flotation, the distribution companies and PowerGen may go all right, but that National Power, with its 20 per cent. nuclear component, may be unmarketable.

I ask my hon. Friends to support the new clause tabled by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North and I hope that he will also receive a lot of support from his own party.

Finally, I should like to draw attention to the document that we have all received today from the Confederation of British Industry. It is rare that I support anything from the CBI but, for different reasons, on this issue we are in agreement. Safety is the paramount issue to the general public and I believe that privatising nuclear power stations is irresponsible purely on safety grounds.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My remarks will be brief, as time is pressing on. I have attended most of the debate.

I cannot support the new clause. It is logical and desirable to include the nuclear industry in the privatisation measure now. I want the industry to be privatised in its entirety at once. It is quite right to do so. It is right also to have a non-fossil fuel obligation, with 15 to 20 per cent. generation coming principally from nuclear power. We cannot risk one supply of energy holding us to ransom. That occurred during two long strikes.

The significant point about the non-fossil fuel obligation is that provision has been made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for renewable sources of energy. I look forward to renewable sources being part of that non-fossil fuel obligation.

I support also the non-fossil fuel levy. For the first time, the cost of generating electricity from different fuel sources will be crystal clear for all to see. That is a great step forward. It is vital to share any additional nuclear costs between the area boards. It is quite right for my right hon. Friend to stipulate that.

There was much talk in Committee about the so-called future nuclear levy. That is absurd as consumers are already paying for nuclear power through the current electricity pricing structure. Of course, customers have been paying a coal levy for over 30 years, as the CEGB has been paying over the market price for British coal. The Opposition cannot escape that fact.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tredinnick: I will not give way.

It is vital that the nuclear industry is privatised now, particularly as we move towards 1992, when the single European market will be with us. We will have a more efficient nuclear industry, and that will be better for consumers, the country and for all of us.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): This has been an extremely wide-ranging debate. *[Interruption.]* I remind hon. Members that I have been present for most of the debate, and I have listened carefully to all the arguments that have been advanced. I even listened carefully to the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). There has been little support by Conservative

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

Members for the new clause which was put down by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet). I listened carefully also to what he had to say.

There is one matter which I should like the Secretary of State to clarify. He made it clear that the Government have an unqualified commitment to build four new PWR stations. I assume that he is prepared to assure the House that that is subject to the normal planning inquiries. I ask him to confirm that there will be public inquiries into the proposals. As he is aware, there is a proposal to build a nuclear power station in my constituency. My constituents would welcome an assurance tonight.

I shall concentrate briefly on the consequences of privatisation for jobs in the nuclear sector. It has already been said that privatisation has consequences for jobs. It is clear that, in putting forward its plans for a nuclear power station in my constituency, the CEGB stressed the economic benefits in terms of jobs and investment that will occur. Irrespective of the arguments for or against nuclear power, the CEGB knows that the only way that it can persuade people in my constituency to support that proposal is on economic grounds—jobs, infrastructure and investment. There remain a number of question marks about that commitment, because already in readiness for privatisation there are changes in the working structures within the Magnox station in my constituency. There is a shift away from full-time maintenance staff to contractors, many of whom come from outside the area.

When the CEGB announced that there would be an application for a nuclear power station in my constituency, we were told that at the height of the building programme 3,500 jobs would be created. That was dangled as a carrot in front of the people who would consider the planning application. Consequently, the CEGB considered that that should have been sufficient for us to accept the building of a nuclear power station. However, the problem is that the CEGB says that only half of those temporary jobs—1,750—will be created locally. It is clear that people within the county of Gwynedd would be capable of undertaking the task, but the CEGB is not prepared to give them the opportunity. That is irrespective of the argument for or against nuclear power.

The privatisation programme is making it impossible for the CEGB to overcome the problems presented by the economic case. My constituents feel very much like pawns in the game. They wonder whether the indemnity given to nuclear power under the Bill will be a temporary commitment that will allow National Power to build those nuclear power stations or whether it will be a continuing one. There will not only be the initial investment and the building costs, but there will be ongoing costs for at least 20 years during the useful life of a nuclear power station and the decommissioning costs at the end. That is why I believe that there are great dangers involved in privatising the industry and why I believe that the House should support the new clause.

Mr. Parkinson: I shall be brief, but I feel that I owe it to the House to reply to a number of specific points. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) is back in his place, because I wanted to deal with his point about West Burton power station.

As a result of the Bill, the obligation to supply is being switched from the Central Electricity Generating Board—the generator—to the area boards. That means that in future the generating companies will be able to build power stations only if they can find a customer for the electricity. In the past, because they had the obligation to supply, they decided on the technology, the site and the size. If it turned out that they had over-estimated and that the industry did not need the power station, we still paid. In future, they will be able to build a power station only if they can find a customer for the electricity. I believe that at present they are negotiating with the area boards to seee if they will buy the electricity that West Burton could produce. This is an inevitable consequence of the change in the obligation to supply. If the hon. Member for Bassetlaw would like to discuss it with me, as he suggested, I should be happy to meet him.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), in a very good speech, the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) made the point that, because there is a non-fossil fuel obligation, that is evidence of an anti-coal attitude. We do not regard it as any such thing. The non-fossil fuel obligation will fix the level of electricity from nuclear sources at exactly the same level as at present—15 to 20 per cent. of the market. That means that 80 to 85 per cent. of the market will be supplied from fossil fuel sources.

In future, coal has the same possibilities as it has now. The difference will be that the generators will be able to buy their coal where they will. As the hon. Member for Wentworth has said, however, if a major purchaser went into the fairly small international market for steam coal, that would have a spectacular effect on prices. We believe that the prospects are extremely good for the British coal industry.

Mr. Hardy: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that comment, but does he accept that some overseas suppliers will be prepared to face a continuing loss to ensure the destruction of British capacity?

Mr. Parkinson: A number of things work in favour of the British coal industry: first, its location; secondly, the fact that it is extremely well equipped; and, thirdly, the facilities do not exist to handle huge imports of coal. For those reasons, the market is open to British coal and I believe that it will supply a substantial part of the market.

11.15 pm

The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) talked about safety and is worried that the industry will be less safe in the private sector. The safety standards will not be relaxed. The nuclear inspectorate is an independent body, and it will supervise the industry as it does now. There will be no change in the codes of safety, the standards expected or the supervision of them. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the two major incidents at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. Three Mile Island was a privately owned power station and Chernobyl was state owned. It is a question not of who owns a power station, but of how it is built, supervised and operated. Standards will be enforced as rigorously in the private sector as they would be in the public sector.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) mentioned planning and suggested that, in future, things will be much easier for those who wish to build nuclear power stations. I do not see that happening. Perhaps we will reach the stage where every application for a nuclear power station will not result in a debate on

whether we should have nuclear power. However, whether the location suggested is correct and whether the technology used is correct will still need to be settled. If there is a demand for a public inquiry—the hon. Gentleman knows how such inquiries come about—it must be held. The legislation will not short-circuit the planning system as suggested by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones).

The Government have no plans to build any nuclear power stations. We are planning to get out of the business of being responsible for the building of power stations. The non-fossil fuel obligation means that we shall need about four PWRs if we are to continue with the same level of electricity generated from nuclear power. Where they will be and what they will be is a matter for the generating companies that apply to build them. There will be no short-circuiting of the planning system, which must be followed properly.

I made a long speech earlier tonight and I have attempted to answer some of the points raised since I spoke. I conclude by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) for the way in which he moved his new clause. He did so in an interesting, almost intimidating, fashion, and it is a disappointment to me that I have to advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against him. I am only sorry that I am unable to accept the new clause, and I hope that my hon. Friend will not feel too lost as he goes into the other Lobby with Opposition Members.

Mr. Barron: We heard the thanks of the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) for his earlier speech on new clause 3, which will no doubt be repeated during the next 12 months or more, prior to the flotation of the electricity industry, if the Bill becomes an Act. It is ironic in many ways that they seem to be on the same side, while both purporting to be major exponents of the nuclear power industry in their different ways.

The speech of the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North was enjoyed by hon. Members from both sides of the House, but perhaps a little more quietly by Conservative Members than Opposition Members. It will probably go down as a memorable speech, although perhaps not as memorable as the speech mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), which was made in the other House a few years ago, and which mentioned the selling of the family silver. I cannot remember what position the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North took on that matter at the time but I think we can see what his position is on the selling of the family plutonium. He appears to be against that, and to wish it could be kept in the public sector.

We discussed the nuclear levy at some length in Committee, and highlighted the effect that it would have on consumers' bills. An amendment was tabled by the Opposition but was fortunately defeated. In that debate the Minister said that he would not accept the amendment because National Power would publish separate, full accounts for its nuclear business when it publishes its main accounts. Most people do not see the accounts of businesses such as National Power unless they are politicians, have a vested interest, or perhaps know a local librarian who is interested in them.

Earlier today the Secretary of State said that the cost of nuclear power would be transparent and that the transparency would, apparently, go no further at this stage than the annual accounts, of National Power. There is no doubt that new clause 16 would involve much more than the national accounts, of National Power, which we assume will be published annually. Without being able to see those accounts most people will be unable to see how uneconomic the nuclear industry is at present. Without the protection afforded to the nuclear industry by the Bill, I and many others are sure that consumers and producers would resist the nuclear industry, and would, instead, concentrate more on debates about developing our resources for renewable energy.

I was pleased that the Secretary of State said that the non-fossil fuel obligation of between 15 per cent. and 20 per cent. would be highlighted. We shall watch with great interest to see what percentage the Government believe that they should aim for. We shall also watch how much research and development the Government put into that area to ensure that targets set are feasible.

I should also like to see the developing and sustaining of the British coal industry—more so within a national and rational energy policy, which is now absent. At this stage, the Government seem prepared to plan energy in terms of nuclear and some small renewables, but not in terms of the rest of the country. We are firmly against that and believe that it highlights a great contradiction in the Government's flotation of the electricity industry. The Government have obviously failed to convince many people in the country that selling off the nuclear power industry is in their interests. We shall wait to see what happens to it when we come closer to the flotation date.

The nuclear levy is another tactic for sustaining the industry. We have been told that while nuclear power might be more expensive now—an admission that has come only in the past 18 months—we must wait because in the future it may seem better when compared to fossil fuel.

In October 1987, when the matter first came to light, Lord Marshall spoke of "jam tomorrow". The Minister has said that if nuclear power were "transparent", as the Secretary of State would wish—and as I would wish even more strongly—10 per cent. on our domestic electricity bills would be shown to be due to it. The CEGB's forecast, which has been highlighted by Opposition Members, suggests that the PWRs at Sizewell and at Hinkley, one of which is under construction, will for the foreseeable future also be more expensive than coal. Consumers have been offered not jam today or jam tomorrow, but, perhaps, no jam at all.

The Secretary of State argued for diversity as the basis for security of supply. Can he picture someone sitting at home, eating a meal cooked on an electric cooker, watching television or perhaps listening to music on the radio? How many people using consumer goods at home wonder how much electricity for them has come from nuclear fuel, how much from renewable fuel and how much from fossil fuel—coal, oil or gas? It is nonsense to suggest that people are concerned about diversity. What people are concerned about is security of supply. The other thing that concerns them is cost—and, as I have said, what the Bill offers is not jam today, tomorrow or in the foreseeable future, but extra costs on electricity bills from nuclear generation.

The Secretary of State told the Committee:

"diversity may have its price. We are prepared to identify, and justify, that price."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 7 February 1989; c. 736.]

[Mr. Barron]

Many Opposition Members feel that the Government have not done that. We cannot see how diversity can be used as a justification for putting up electricity prices now.

The Secretary of State also said in Committee that the cost of coal was a secondary consideration for the CEGB. The right hon. Gentleman knows better than anyone that in 1986, after the fall in the oil price, British Coal immediately lowered it price to the CEGB, which it has consistently done since then. In real terms, the cost of British coal to the electricity industry has been reduced. It is not the burden that hon. Members have described.

That price is an important consideration can be seen from the offer made by British Coal to the new generating companies—long-term contracts below or within the RPI for the next five or 10 years. That offer has been made nowhere else. In the past 12 months there has been a reduction in the coal price of some 30 per cent. in real dollar terms, and that is likely to continue. Everyone knows that if the new generators went on to the market now there would be colossal balance of payments problems, and also an increase in world coal prices. That is not an option for Britain at this time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) mentioned the Humber ports. Today we have seen for the first time the report from the Committee on the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill. In what, as the Secretary of State knows, is a preamble to its decision, the Committee says:

"In our view it is the Government's duty to take whatever steps are necessary, in the overall national interest, to protect the indigenous coal-mining industry."

That is what we hope that the Minister will do. Rather than merely speaking at the Dispatch Box, we want him to make sure that there is as much protection for the British coal industry as there has been for the nuclear industry.

11.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy said earlier today that his party had been elected on a commitment to maintain nuclear power. He got it nearly right: his party was elected on this commitment, but the Conservative party campaign guide for 1987 said:

"More nuclear power means that the rise in demand for electricity can be met cheaply and effectively",

and the Conservative manifesto of 1987 said:

"We intend to go on playing a leading role in the task of developing abundant, low-cost supplies of nuclear electricity".

Neither of those got it right, as might have been clear for the last 30 years if there had been the transparency for which the Secretary of State now argues.

What the Government have been saying is commonly not the case. There is a central contradiction in what the Government stand for in relation to privatisation. They will feather-bed the nuclear industry, whether in respect of decommissioning, day-to-day running, or investment in the new PWRs. In Committee the Secretary of State said of the nuclear industry:

"If there is a price to pay, we are prepared to pay it."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 7 February 1989; c 738.]

Well, we in the Opposition believe that that price is one that the nation cannot afford, and we will oppose this sale.

Sir Trevor Skeet: We have had a good debate. This is a major issue, and I think the House should divide.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 199, Noes 254.

Division No. 141] **[11.31 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott

Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Grist, Ian
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richerd
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Further consideration of the Bill adjourned.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered tomorrow.

11.44 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may have heard reports, but because of the duties you have been performing this evening you will not have had an opportunity to see for yourself. Therefore, we want to allow you time to consider this.

This evening, on television, there has been a series of reports of an interview by Sir Leon Brittan relating to the Westland affair. In it he said that the release of the Solicitor-General's letter was approved by Charles Powell, the relevant private secretary at No. 10, and by Mr. Bernard Ingham, the Prime Minister's press secretary and that there would have been no question of a release of that document without that express approval from No. 10.

Yet in his evidence, reported in the fourth report of the Select Committee on Defence—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry; Conservative Members must understand that we have rights in the House as well. *[Interruption.]* A majority of 100 does not constitute absolute rights to dictate what happens.

The fourth report of the Select Committee on Defence, said in paragraph 203:

"Mr. Brittan told us that he had no discussion with anyone in No. 10 before the disclosure."

We have a clear conflict of evidence in which there may have been a serious injustice done to the House by Sir Leon and/or by the Prime Minister.

I understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you cannot give us a ruling this evening on the most appropriate way in which we should proceed to inquire into it, but it is a matter of enormous severity, as you will understand. May I ask that tomorrow afternoon you or Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time, give advice to the House on how to pursue the issue?

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not a fact that that interview took place before Christmas, that it was not considered——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I do not think that the hon. and learned Gentleman should proceed to debate the matter. I recognise the importance that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) attaches to what he has said to the House. If he believes that questions of privilege are involved, he knows that it is a matter on which he should write to Mr. Speaker. I shall in any event make sure that Mr. Speaker is aware of what has been said on this occasion.

Mr. Lawrence: May I be heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you heard the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Lawrence: If it is a fact that that interview took place before Christmas and——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that I had made it clear to the hon. and learned Gentleman that I was not prepared to allow a debate on what had bern said. That is precisely what the hon. and learned Gentleman is seeking to embark upon.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That during the proceedings on the matter of Housing in Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet, and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), the second such sitting shall not commence before Four o'clock nor continue after the Committee has considered the matter for two hours at that sitting.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are you aware that the remarks made by Sir Leon in his broadcast are identical to those made in a debate in the House on 27——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members do not listen to what I say. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to turn a point of order into a debate. I will not allow that to happen.

LAW OF PROPERTY (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

General Practitioners (Wales)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

11.50 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I am grateful for this opportunity to draw attention to the difficulties inherent in the Government's proposals for the reform of the National Health Service. The proposals for general practice will have a crucial bearing on our primary health care. It is therefore important that they are the right policies, that they have the full backing and support of GPs and health professionals, and that they are policies which will carry the Health Service forward with enthusiasm and commitment into the next century.

From the representations that I received from GPs in west Glamorgan at a meeting on 29 March, from the Powys local medical committee and from letters that I have received from doctors, including hospital doctors, it would seem that consultation and negotiation about the White Paper "Working for Patients" and the GPs' contracts have a long way to go before they can be regarded as supportive of improvements in primary health care. The comments by the Secretary of State for Health that GPs are concerned only about their cheque books are cheap and nasty and say far more about his own values and attitudes to health care than about the average GP's concern about the best way of organising surgeries, clinics and work schedules. The projection of the right hon. Gentleman's priorities to his critics ill becomes his office and responsibilities.

Critics of the right hon. Gentleman's proposals are to be found in large numbers. Under the White Paper proposals, GPs are already concerned that their role, as it were, of an independent broker between patient and the other Health Service facilities will be undermined. At present, a patient consulting his GP can rely on the doctor to offer him a course of treatment of a referral determined only by the GP's expertise and the patient's interests. When a GP has the additional responsibility of providing treatment or referral at the cheapest option—not necessarily the most cost-effective in the long term—from the patient's viewpoint the GP is no longer independent in the same way. Public concern is already mounting and I predict that there will be many more public meetings in Wales similar to the one that Councillor Brian Ford, with the support of his local GPs, has arranged in Clydach on 21 April.

The stated aims of the proposals in the White Paper are that patients should have a new deal, more choice, higher standards of health care and better quality care. The effects of the proposed new contracts for GPs in practices outside major cities, especially in rural and semi-rural areas such as Wales, including parts of my constituency, will directly conflict with those aims. Patients will certainly have a new deal, but it will not be a better deal—they will have less choice, lower standards of health care and no better quality of care. It is ironic that a Government whose basic philosophy and lodestar is the belief that people respond only to incentives, especially financial incentives, cannot see that the new contracts comprise a series of positive disincentives to GPs to maintain and promote primary health care services.

For example, the targets that GPs must reach to be paid for immunisation programmes were set at 90 per cent. Those were penal targets, penal because in England and Wales as a whole in 1987-88 the average take-up rates of immunisation for vaccines such as whooping cough and measles were 70 and 75 per cent. respectively. In Wales, take-up has traditionally been lower, at 62 and 65 per cent. respectively, and in west Glamorgan, which has been extremely resistant, take-up was an abysmal 51 per cent. for whooping cough and 57 per cent. for measles.

On 8 February 1988, from a parliamentary answer I received from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales about immunisation against measles, diptheria, whooping cough, tetanus and polio in each county in Wales, I note that only Powys, in relation only to diptheria, tetanus and polio, had immunisation take-up of over 90 per cent. Knowing that, and unable themselves to provide a solution, the Government expect individual GPs to meet targets that have never been reached. Even 80 per cent. has not been widely reached, even with the new triple vaccine, even in health-conscious mainly middle-class areas. If GPs respond to the financial incentive in the proposed contracts, they will not even attempt immunisation programmes but will divert their time and effort elsewhere.

Cervical cytology testing is another area of primary health care which will be seriously undermined. The target of 80 per cent. for testing women aged over 35 years at five-yearly intervals is, again, unrealistic and puts the onus on GPs to press their patients into treatment which, however clearly beneficial, too many women often do not want to contemplate. Not only is there the same financial incentive to GPs not to take on the hassle of chasing target women and the administrative workload of results and recall, but I find it petty in a particularly mean way for the Government to ignore the fact that many GPs already recognise best medical practice and test all sexually active women at three-yearly intervals, routinely and without payment. It ill becomes the Government not only to settle for targets which are less than best practice but to haggle like fishwives about targets of second-rate effectiveness which are supposed to be improving standards and quality of care.

The proposed switch of emphasis to capitation payments will do nothing to improve the choice, standard or quality of care. Linking a large proportion of GPs' pay merely with the number of patients on a list is not the progressive reform that the Secretary of State for Health claims. The policy of rewarding larger lists was abandoned as a discredited system in 1966 because it encouraged poor patient services. As lists have been reduced, GPs have improved and extended services, particularly in rural practices, and the Government cannot claim otherwise. Since 1966 there has also been an invaluable exchange of ideas between practices because GPs are not competing for patients. That is likely to be inhibited among some GPs.

Powys local medical committee has already told the Secretary of State for Health that the committee is appalled that his civil servants are completely lacking in knowledge about the way in which rural health care is organised. The practice of Dr Mark Vernon-Roberts in Scurlage in my constituency of Gower is typical of many.

As well as carrying out surgeries and branch surgery sessions and making home visits, which are extra-frequent and extra-time-consuming because of the distance, GPs also regularly and routinely visit nursing and residential homes, for which they are not paid. They hold ante-natal and baby clinics; they hold well women clinics,

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undertaking breast examination, family planning services and blood pressure checks; and they hold well person clinics, undertaking general health examinations and influencing lifestyle risk factors. They also hold diabetic clinics and provide facilities for blood testing to save long and expensive trips to hospital, and they provide minor surgical and casualty services at the surgery and in local hospitals. In Powys, where there is no district general hospital, GPs are vital in keeping open community hospitals such as those at Newtown, Brecon and Ystradgynlais. In addition, they have prescribing and administrative functions.

It does not take a time and motion expert to appreciate that if a GP's pay is to depend on how many patients he has on his list, the standard and quality of care must deteriorate unless he discards some of his functions to take on more patients so as to keep his income up to today's levels or offers fewer services that he can afford to provide on a lower income from a lower list.

The financial incentive in the proposed contract in regard to capitation allowances is for GPs to take on more patients and reduce services so as to maximise income. The alternative is to merge practices to achieve economies of scale. The merging of practices can only reduce patient choice. When patients are ill they prefer to see a GP they know. Large practices work against that preference as they need to become highly organised and more bureaucratic. In my experience, bureaucracy and personal interaction conflict. The merging of practices is practical only in city areas. In rural and semi-rural areas it is not an option. Rural practices have traditionally been paid an extra capitation allowance to take account of the extra expenses arising from large areas and dispersed populations.

The Government propose additional capitation fees linked to a so far undisclosed population density in electoral wards. Electoral wards in rural areas are often very large and internally variable in density, so a rural doctor may find himself disqualified even though his practice area would easily meet the criteria. The question has to be asked—why abandon old and well-tested methods of distributing a fixed sum in favour of new and arbitrary ones?

Listening to the general practitioners, it is clear that in the negotiations which are still taking place the additional allowances must be seen as essential if the present level of care is to be maintained. Although there may be a redistribution of patients from one rural practice to another, it is unlikely that there will be an overall increase or decrease in the number of patients on an individual general practitioner's list. If one lives in or near a village or hamlet 10 or 20 miles from any sizeable town, with no public transport, no car or one car that the husband needs for work, and no chemist, one is glad to take the choice of general practitioners in the nearest practice and appreciate a branch surgery five miles away.

Rural practices will be particularly penalised by the capitation and rural capitation allowances proposals. They cannot obtain economies of scale. The Powys local medical committee reports that between 45 per cent. and 65 per cent. of a general practitioner's gross income is spent on staff wages, rent, rates, heating, telephones, administration and equipment for the services provided. Rural practices also operate branch surgeries for which the general practitioner has to pay. If the income of practices is reduced under the terms of the proposed new contracts, it is inevitable that patient facilities at surgeries will be reduced and that more patients in rural areas will more frequently have to use or make expensive arrangements to travel to hospital for the care and treatment that could and should be available for them in their home or at the local surgery.

What is most likely to happen if rural general practitioners respond to the financial incentives in the new contract proposals as they stand is that, when a partner retires or leaves, he will not be replaced. With fewer general practitioners sharing the same number of patients, the remaining partners could maximise their income. The partners would be unlikely to take on a part-time colleague, most likely a women, because the capitation system works against part-timers almost to the point of discriminating against women. Fewer partners maintaining the same level of income into the practice to pay for extra services such as clinics, minor operations, casualty facilities and so on means a heavier work load for the remaining partners and, therefore, less time for each patient. It is a catch-22 situation.

There is another catch-22 for rural practice general practitioners—the new 20-hour rule. That is the number of hours a general practitioner must spend in the surgery each week. I have already outlined the many ways in which the role of rural general practitioners is much less centred on care in remote surgeries and, of necessity, far more geared to caring in the home and the community than the city practice with which the Secretary of State and his civil servants are more familiar. Rural general practitioners agree that the 20-hour rule would work against patients' interests in rural areas. It will do nothing to improve standards and quality of care. In fact, it will cause a deterioration in standards.

Rural general practitioners will lose out on another aspect of the new contracts. It seems possible that those who perform minor surgical operations in their surgeries will receive additional payments in recognition of that additional responsibility and the costs of providing staff and equipment for the facility. That should benefit rural general practitioners, who already undertake many such operations routinely. In comparison with their city colleagues, they save the National Health Service disproportionately more every time they perform such tasks, in terms of ambulance and hospital costs, patient care and convenience, by not referring patients to distant hospitals. However, it is just not practical and cost-efficient in the use of time for rural general practitioners to carry out at least five such procedures per session so that they can be paid for carrying out even one. The Secretary of State must look again at that aspect of the contract.

Many general practitioners are unhappy about the changes in the contract for the use of deputising services and 24-hour cover. The measure will also affect semi-rural areas where one practice covers for another, but will not affect rural practices which already cover for their partners. The exception is the single general practitioner practice. For the single practice general practitioner, the contract could be described as the death knell. All the problems inherent in the contract that I have outlined for general practitioners work against the one-practitioner practice. It seems that the Government regard such a practitioner as an anachronism, but those patients who

chose their general practitioner on the basis of continuing personal care from the same doctor for the whole family would not agree.

There are justified fears about the impact of the Government's proposals on the quality of patient care in primary health care. If we are really looking for policies that will enable general practitioner services to expand and develop the quality of care to patients—and not just to save money—the proposals are not only inadequate but deeply flawed. They are ill conceived and show that the Government are far removed from the real world and what is happening in general practice, especially in rural areas.

In articulating the points made to me by general practitioners, I have shown that their criticism stems from their interests in their patients' well-being. I have not found their interest and motivation in putting over their case to be purely financial. Rather they are concerned, from the real world of their practices, to ensure that what they have achieved in improving primary health care is not undermined by changes motivated only by the need to cut spending.

Since the first Black report in 1979, there has been a plethora of reports and research showing unacceptable levels of inequality in health in Britain. The Government have long paid lip service to the need to establish strong primary health care teams, led by general practitioners, to tackle endemic problems. The White Paper reforms and the proposed contracts for general practitioners provide an opportunity to implement long-needed changes. Instead, however, unless the Government are prepared to listen and negotiate on the basis of informed argument, we shall have yet another sector of fine public service sacrificed on the altar of cost cutting.

I trust that the Government will be prepared to listen and that meaningful negotiations will take place. I trust that the Under-Secretary will ensure that we do not regress to a Government preoccupation with list sizes as the criteria for good health care. I trust, on behalf of my constituents and of people throughout Wales and the rest of Britain, that rural health care will continue to be dictated by patient need, not by Government-determined, city-oriented economic efficiency.

12.8 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on being successful in the selection for the Adjournment debate. He spoke with the trenchancy that we have come to expect. I welcome the opportunity to reiterate the Government's position in respect of our proposals for the new contract for GPs. In particular, I want to correct some of the misunderstandings that appear to have arisen within the profession which the hon. Gentleman has adumbrated this evening. The hon. Gentleman has made a number of points about the contract and its specific effect on rural areas and in the time allowed or left I shall do my best to answer some of the points raised.

However, I want first to underline the crucial and central role of the GP in the Health Service. He or she is the linchpin of that service and the first and main point of contact for every citizen, and will remain so under our proposals.

I remind the House that the new contract proposals now under wide ranging discussion spring from our 1987 White Paper "Promoting Better Health" which contained the following objectives: to improve value for money, which includes wise as well as effective prescribing; to give patients the widest range of choice in obtaining high quality primary care services; to raise standards of care; to promote health and prevent illness; and to make services more responsive to the needs of the consumer. The new contract proposals set out the methods for achieving those objectives. I shall give just three examples.

First, we propose to introduce practice leaflets and annual reports for general medical practice. These will enable patients to be better informed about the services which are available to them so that they can make more informed decisions about their choice of doctors. This is an essential change if we are to make progress in informing the patient—as a consumer—of the services provided by doctors.

Secondly, the proposed incentive payments in respect of health promotion clinics, minor surgery, services to children and the elderly will shift health promotion and disease prevention to the very centre of primary care provision. That is vital if we are to use our resources to the best possible effect for patients.

Thirdly, the switch to capitation-linked payments means that a GP will have a strong incentive to sustain and develop service standards for patients.

I believe that these and the other measures that are implicit in the new contract will make a quite fundamental contribution to securing the future of primary health care services in this country. But, of course, we recognise that change—however positive—can be and clearly is unsettling. I know that GPs in rural practice have particular concerns, which I want to deal with now.

In the first place there has been some anxiety that rural practices might lose revenue due to the change from the present rural practice payment system to the basic practice allowance rural capitation supplement. Throughout our consideration of these matters we have had the particular circumstances of general practice in rural areas very much in mind. How could it be otherwise for those of us in Wales? To begin with we have to face the fact that the present rural practice payment system is poorly targeted. Payments are made relative to rural practice areas which were defined prior to the local government reorganisation on 1 April 1974. The hon. Gentleman will accept that in the intervening period, a number of areas have undergone considerable change—to put it mildly.

By contrast the proposed rural supplement will be simple to administer and monitor, better targeted, and constructed to provide adequate remuneration for GPs serving sparsely populated rural areas. The supplement will ensure that doctors are not disadvantaged under the new remuneration system because they practise in rural areas where the population density is lower than in towns. The supplement will be banded so that GPs working in areas of greater sparsity of population will receive proportionately more per patient. It is not intended that the supplement be related to work load. It is meant to assist in sustaining broad parity of earning capacity between doctors in rural areas and those in urban areas.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the rural supplement would work against the consumer's interests because GPs might find it more difficult to look after patients living at some distance from the surgery than those in the same ward living nearby. But that is to ignore the effect of the increased emphasis on capitation, which

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will encourage GPs to offer and maintain attractive services for all their patients wherever they live. Each patient will attract a standard capitation fee, plus extra basic practice allowance, if the GP's list is below 1,500, plus the rural supplement which, as I have said, will be pitched at a higher level in very sparsely populated areas.

Another way in which the situation of the rural practice will be recognised is through the weighting of our proposals for basic practice allowance capitation supplement. We appreciate that there are certain basic costs in running a practice irrespective of its size. So the BPA capitation supplement, which is payable for up to 1,500 patients per GP, is to be weighted in discrete stages for each group of 500 patients so that the supplement is highest for the first 500.

As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, many rural practitioners are concerned about the requirement in the new contract that 20 hours of surgery time will be given over five days. We shall reflect on the comments made about this, but I should just like to say two things. First, I was interested to read in *Pulse*, a medical journal, of 18 March that in a survey that it had undertaken no less than 82 per cent. of GPs already met the proposed requirement for 20 hours spread over at least five days. I mention that only as an indicator—no more—of what is being done already.

The second point is that a number of the GPs in rural areas are already providing a wide range of services in terms of clinics and minor surgery services. A number of them seem to be unaware that the time spent in clinics also counts towards the 20 hours. In addition, under our proposals, GPs will in future be paid a sessional fee for running clinics, and we also have proposals for minor surgery fees. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support the view that it is right to reward those GPs who put in the effort to provide those much-needed services.

Two other matters of particular concern to rural practices which the hon. Gentleman raised concern our proposals for targets for child vaccination and immunisation, cervical cytology, and minor surgery sessions. In respect of targets for vaccination and immunisation which are in line with World Health Organisation recommendations, these proposals form part of our wider efforts to increase take-up and coverage—an objective which I am sure that doctors will wish to support.

Additionally, family practitioner committees and district health authorities are being encouraged to address those issues, for example by developing effective call-recall sytems and by making best use of staff in attaining high levels of coverage in their areas. Obviously, there is a place for health education in this sphere, and I am sure that the health promotion authority for Wales will have its own contributions to make here in conjunction with health education within district health authorities. I am grateful for the comments made on these two matters, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that serious consideration is being given to the views expressed by GPs and others.

I should like to take this opportunity to correct another misconception which has been mentioned to my officials during the Helpline telephone calls, and that is in respect of part-time GPs. Again, the hon. Gentleman raised that point. If he looks at page 18 of the contract, he will know what I am talking about.

It has been suggested that, under the 20 hours proposal, GPs on a part-time basis will no longer be employable. That is a misunderstanding of the proposals concerning job-sharing, part-time working and the so-called fractional doctors. GPs wishing to work part-time will still qualify for basic practice allowance capitation supplements, but at a reduced rate. Those doctors will continue to be principals in their own right, fully responsible for the patients on their lists but the BPA capitation supplement will need to be abated for fractional GPs to take account of the fact that their standing expenses will be lower than those of a full-time GP.

However, the abatement will be pitched at a level which will act as an incentive to flexible working. That should be particularly welcome to GPs with domestic commitments who wish to return to general practice on a part-time basis. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government remain committed to their objective of drawing more women doctors into general practice. They will be all the more valuable to practices if they offer one of the specialties for which we are introducing new fees—for example, minor surgery or child health surveillance.

I believe that the new contract will give the most powerful stimulus to enhancing the quality of patient care. The Government are whole-heartedly committed to the objective of helping the family doctor service to maintain and advance standards of practice. We aim to encourage GPs to provide the services that their patients want, and to ensure that those who offer a range of high quality services are properly rewarded. That will inevitably lead to an improved service for patients and a level of remuneration for doctors which will more accurately reflect their performance and commitment, which is the Government's commitment, to the National Health Service.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 6 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 2) BILL
Lords amendments agreed to:

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (No. 2) BILL
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read a Third time on Thursday 13 April.

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (HULL) BILL *(By Order)*

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

WENTWORTH ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE SOUTHBANK BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL
(By Order)

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 13 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL FINANCE

Unleaded Petrol

1. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the anticipated excise revenue on unleaded petrol for the current year; and if he will make a statement.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): The excise duty revenue on unleaded petrol will be about £665 million in 1989-90.

Mr. Gregory: Now that the Chancellor has increased the tax differential between leaded and unleaded petrol to 14p per gallon, which I understand is the second highest in the EC after Denmark, does my hon. Friend agree that petroleum companies should extend the availability of unleaded petrol so that more motorists can do the green thing and support the Government?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is correct when he says that our differential is now greater than that of any country apart from Denmark. Because of the additional changes that we made in the Budget affecting the price of two-star petrol, an even greater number of filling stations are transferring pumps and storage capacity from two-star and three-star petrol to unleaded petrol, and the response so far is encouraging.

Mr. Frank Field: Why have the Government found it necessary to rig the free market in favour of unleaded petrol? Would it be right for voters to draw from that a conclusion that on the growing agenda of environmental issues an untrammelled free market does not serve the best long-term interests of mankind?

Mr. Lilley: We have never believed that environmental considerations are best met by an untrammelled free market. We have always been prepared to introduce incentives, as we have done here, to encourage a better environment. By and large the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget have been warmly welcomed by all those concerned about the environment.

Manufacturing Investment

2. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest information on the investment intentions of British manufacturing industry.

12. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest information on the investment intentions of British manufacturing industry.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Nigel Lawson): The Financial Statement and Budget Report forecast is for business investment to rise by 8 per cent. in 1989.

Mr. Shepherd: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. Does he agree that it shows that under the Government manufacturing investment is growing satisfactorily? Will he confirm that in terms of GDP, total

manufacturing investment is now higher than it was at any time during the last Labour Administration? Can he say whether this growth is fully nationwide?

Mr. Lawson: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The investment boom that has been continuing now in this country for several years and is scheduled to continue in this current year is nationwide. It is perfectly true that total investment is a higher proportion of GDP than in any year under the last Labour Government and indeed business investment last year—1988—was the highest proportion of GDP since records began. As for manufacturing investment, the latest Department of Trade and Industry investment intention survey suggested that manufacturing investment will rise by 11 per cent. in 1989—far and away the highest figure ever.

Mr. Irvine: Does my right hon. Friend agree that this continuing high level of investment is the best possible indication of confidence by industry and commerce in the Government's financial policy and in the fundamental strength of the British economy?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right. It has long been the case in this country that our two main problems—they have been identified in the past by many outside commentators—were a poor rate of growth of investment and a poor rate of growth of productivity. Now we have the highest rate of growth of investment in the 1980s of any major country in Europe. Indeed, over the past seven years total investment has grown more than twice as fast as consumption and we also have, of course, throughout the 1980s an unprecedented growth in productivity and so the fundamentals of the British economy are improving in the way that we always desired, but never before achieved.

Mrs. Mahon: If the Chancellor believes that the economy is improving so much, why were 20,000 jobs lost in the textile, clothing and hosiery industry last year? Will he give us his forecast for the future of textiles over the next 12 months?

Mr. Lawson: Of course I am well aware of the difficulties of the textile and hosiery industry, not least because I represent an east midlands constituency. But of course there are some industries that shed jobs and there are others that put them on. What we have seen is overall —taking the economy as a whole—unemployment falling further and faster than in any other country, and than in any other period. Indeed we now have a level of unemployment in this country well below the European Community average.

Mr. Grocott: Can the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirm that, according to the Government's press release of 15 March, manufacturing investment in 1988 was £10,990 million while manufacturing investment in 1979 —nearly 10 long years ago—was £11,137 million? Is that not a pathetic record?

Mr. Lawson: I do not think that it is a pathetic record. As I pointed out, total business investment is at a higher proportion of GDP than it has ever been since records were first collected. What was happening in manufacturing industry under the Labour Government was that there was so much—*[Interruption.]* I am answering the hon. Member's question. He asked me a question and I am now answering it. What was happening then was that as a result of restrictive practices, inefficiency and, in many cases, poor management the return on the capital then was very very poor. It was necessary to increase investment substantially in manufacturing, it was necessary to get more output—which is what we have got—more output and better and more efficient use of existing capital. Now the forecast is for manufacturing investment to rise, as it is set to do in the current year, to a record level and the quality of investment is far higher as is shown by the return on manufacturing investment. So the hon. Member does not know the first thing that he is talking about.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the continuing buoyancy of investment in this country is one of the most favourable and promising factors for the prospects of non-inflationary growth? It is vital that nothing should be done to damage that investment confidence. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that his very cautious Budget did a great deal to reassure industry and shore up that very important confidence?

Mr. Lawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the Budget and of course he is quite right to emphasise the importance of confidence. Confidence in this country is very high and this is shown, of course, most recently by the CBI survey of investment intentions. It really is deplorable, the way in which the Labour party can do nothing but try to run Britain down and to deny the facts of investment success and of investment boom that are all around us.

Balance of Payments

3. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget forecast for the balance of payments in 1989 and 1990.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Major): None, Sir.

Dr. Godman: After learning last week's figures, does the Chief Secretary's right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, now predict that the balance of payments deficit for this year will rise or fall?

Mr. Major: I see no reason to change the estimate that my right hon. Friend gave some time ago.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Bearing in mind the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to the last questions, does my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary accept that if interest rates were lower, investment in this country would be higher and that our balance of payments would improve? Does my right hon. Friend agree that interest rates have affected, and will affect, investment, and that investment will have a direct impact on our balance of payments?

Mr. Major: What would certainly have a very direct effect on investment would be a failure to take the action necessary to bring down inflation—and that is the purpose of the current short-term interest rate policy. One of the attractive aspects of investment over the past year or two is that so much of it has been made out of retained profits, whereas in previous years and under previous Governments, profits were not there to provide for investment.

Mr. John Smith: Has the Chief Secretary seen the international monetary fund's prediction that the balance of payments deficit for 1989 will reach a record £17 billion? As the Chancellor got it so badly wrong this year, why should we believe his prediction this year as opposed to that of the IMF?

Mr. Major: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that the IMF was equally inaccurate last year, as were most other forecasters. The right hon. and learned Gentleman neglects to mention that the IMF report also described the Government's policies as being entirely appropriate, and it confirmed that our strong fiscal policies support monetary policy and strengthen confidence.

Mr. Beith: Would the Government regard it as an achievement if, instead of being £10 billion out with their balance of payments forecast, this year they were only about £6 billion out? Will the Chief Secretary explain why he believes that exports will rise more than twice as fast as imports in order to make his promise come true?

Mr. Major: There is no doubt that in recent years exports have been performing extremely well. The reasons why we believe that export performance will continue include the degree of investment and the improved supply-side performance.

Mr. Sumberg: As we listen to the views of Opposition Members and hear their policies unfolded, is it not becoming clearer day by day that the Labour party remains the party of high taxation and of higher spending than we can afford, and that it wants to return to the days of public borrowing and public debt?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend describes the situation with precise accuracy.

Profit-related Pay

4. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the work force is currently participating in profit-related pay schemes as defined by the Inland Revenue.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): Take-up of profit-related pay has been encouraging. So far, about 121,000 employees are participating in PRP schemes. In his Budget statement, my right hon. Friend announced several improvements and simplifications to the tax relief for PRP. We expect those further to encourage take-up.

Dr. Reid: Why does the Minister not answer my question and say what percentage of workers are involved in such schemes? I have worked out that a total of 121,000 participating employees out of a work force of 28 million represents less than 0·5 per cent. Is that not an indication of the scheme's dismal failure? Why does not the Chancellor admit that the abolition of the 5 per cent. rule is an indication of yet another failure of one of his pet schemes? Why does he persist in throwing good money after bad, when there is no evidence that it has any beneficial effect on the economy? Why does he not get down to tackling the real problems facing the British economy?

Mr. Lamont: I did not give the precise figure for which the hon. Gentleman asked because he is such a brilliant mathematician that I thought that he could work it out. When he gave his figure, he worked it out wrongly. As one of my hon. Friends said, it is over ½ per cent. but under 1 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* This is just over a year after the scheme was introduced. The take-up is ahead of that of the all-employee share scheme when it was a year old. This scheme is being taken up more quickly than other schemes when they were introduced. I do not know why the hon. Gentleman wants to make out that the scheme is a failure. I should have thought that any Socialist Opposition might be interested in the idea of profit-related pay, which gives people a stake in their company and helps to make pay bargaining more flexible. Any sensible person should want to encourage that.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Will my right hon. Friend note that this Budget has done an immense amount to boost the participation of workers in the success of the companies for which they work? Will he urge companies and trade unions to take up such schemes more often? It is not the Government's fault that the take-up rate has been slow, it is the fault of those in industry who have not realised that, in the long term, workers participating in the success of their companies, and not dependency on the annual wage round, is the way forward.

Mr. Lamont: I know of my hon. Friend's great interest, particularly in employee share ownership plans. Again, we have introduced some tax reliefs, and we will certainly do everything we can to encourage employees and employers to take them up. I repeat the point that I made earlier. After 18 months, it is not surprising that only that proportion has taken up PRP. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) said, the changes that were introduced in the Budget and the 5 per cent. rule will encourage more people. That is a good thing.

Interest Rates

5. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Japan.

Mr. Lilley: Three month market interest rates on 4 April were 13 per cent. in the United Kingdom, 9·8 per cent. in the United States of America, and 4·6 per cent. in Japan.

Mr. Turner: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has a reputation for straight talking. I do not think that we got straight talking in his answer to a question from the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). May I try again? In terms of the widely differing interest rates, how on earth does he expect British business to seek to reduce the balance of payments deficit? Will he give us a straight answer? He said that interest rates in Japan are 4·6 per cent., compared with 13 per cent. in this country.

Mr. Lilley: The level of profitability of British industry has been restored to levels which it has not seen for a long time, and it is so healthy that it is clear that British industry can compete.

Mr. Budgen : Is the Japanese economy a good example of what happens when Governments reduce interest rates too much? Is my hon. Friend aware that, when interest rates in Japan were reduced to their present low level at the beginning of 1987, the price of residential land was already

the highest in the world by a long way and was increasing by 9 per cent. per annum? It then started to increase by 27 per cent. The price of land and that increase is a major cause of the social and political turmoil that Japan is going through at present.

Mr. Lilley: I am happy to say that my responsibilities do not extend to the Japanese economy. I am sure that my hon. Friend's remarks will be noticed there and that his concern for their current difficulties will be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Radice: Has the Minister noticed that the Government urge a strong yen to reduce the Japanese surplus, whereas in Britain they urge a strong pound to reduce our deficit? Which is the right course of action?

Mr. Lilley: It is clear that, in an economy such as ours, devaluation would largely feed increased inflation and would affect the value of the pound in the hon. Gentleman's pocket. Therefore, we believe that the exchange rate should not be allowed to depreciate. The Group of Seven Ministers reaffirmed the desire of the Finance Ministers of the leading countries to seek continued stability of exchange rates.

Mr. Hanley: Does my hon. Friend agree that if levels of personal savings were as high in Britain as they are in Japan and if levels of personal borrowings were as low in Britain as they are in Japan, interest rates might be much more in parity?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend who, I am sure, does not share the view that I am responsible for the Japanese economy, makes a good point. We are anxious to see saving encouraged and borrowing discouraged, which is what higher interest rates achieve. I must point out that although personal savings have been low, there has been a good recovery in savings and investments by industrial companies.

Inflation

6. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of the European Economic Community have inflation rates lower than that in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lawson: On the basis of comparable figures, seven EEC member countries currently have lower inflation than the United Kingdom and four have higher inflation.

Mr. Buckley: Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer agree that the United Kingdom inflation rate of 7·8 per cent. is largely a consequence of Government policy in pushing up electricity, gas and transport prices and of the high mortgage rate, which is punishing people in this country?

Mr. Lawson: No, I do not agree with any of that and, indeed, the higher mortgage rates, which are a consequence of higher interest rates generally, are necessary to get inflation down because I do agree that inflation is currently too high. Indeed inflation, which during the whole of our period of office has averaged 1 per cent. above the European Community average, is currently 3 per cent. above the European Community average. However, to put that in perspective, it is worth recalling that during the whole of the period of the Labour Government, our inflation rate was 6 per cent. above the European Community average.

Mr. Dykes: Is not the ominous truth now dawning that higher interest rates actually add to the rate of inflation, which in turn creates an additional spiral?

Mr. Lawson: No, Sir.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Will the Chancellor confirm that after the rises in gas, electricity and water charges, in rents and rates, including the poll tax in Scotland, and even in television licences, prescriptions and the new eyesight charges, the petrol price rise is the ninth rise in one week? How many more price rises must we have on his road to zero inflation?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman is extremely perceptive and he has noticed that he has just informed the House of the interesting fact that, until inflation is zero, prices tend to rise.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my right hon. Friend aware that despite all his great efforts in this respect, there will always be considerable difficulties for any Government in this country while we have the relentless annual wage awards in both the private and public sectors, irrespective of performance?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is certainly right that it is desirable that British industry should keep a tight control of its costs and that, of course, includes, most importantly, pay costs. Nevertheless, that is not the primary cause of inflation, although it does add to the difficulties for British industry in dealing with the current situation. But the remedy is in its own hands. But inflation is the responsibility of the Government and it is the responsibility of the Government to get inflation down by pursuing an adequately tight monetary policy and that is what we are doing. The Opposition, by their repeated calls, which we have heard again today, for lower interest rates are revealing themselves, once again, as the party of higher inflation.

Tax Relief

7. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of tax relief in relation to *(a)* enterprise zones, *(b)* business expansion schemes and *(c)* personal equity plans.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The estimated costs of the business expansion scheme and personal equity plans are £100 million and £15 million respectively in 1988-89. The latest year for which estimates of the cost of the relief relating to enterprise zones are available is 1985-86, when the cost was about £60 million.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister agree that what the Chancellor has done in making personal equity plans tax deductible to cover privatisation in the coming year is to admit that the privatisation of electricity and water cannot take place without creating a tax loophole? Will he tell us, therefore, what the cost of privatising electricity and water will be to the taxpayer, as the Government have again thought up a wonderfully socially progressive idea for getting the non-shareholding classes to subsidise the shareholding classes?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman seems terrified that the privatisation of water or electricity might be a success and, therefore, more difficult for the Labour party to reverse. The hon. Gentleman is exaggerating wildly. The purpose of the changes to personal equity plans that my right hon. Friend made in his Budget is to encourage wider share ownership. The point relating to new issues was one detail and the cost of that is extremely modest.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best form of tax relief is straight reductions in tax rates? As Opposition Members seem to have grasped that fact and, in their increasingly desperate scramble for office, are making their party more voter-friendly by following the lead that we have been giving for the past 10 years, can my right hon. Friend tease out of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) the bands at which the lower rates of tax that the Opposition propose would be payable?

Mr. Lamont: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Leader of the Opposition made a tantalising speech earlier this week when he attempted to explain the tax policies of the Labour party. However, as my hon. Friend has identified, he left out the absolutely crucial point and most of us are wondering where the beef was in that speech.

Mr. Chris Smith: Does the Financial Secretary accept that the business expansion scheme, especially now, when it is so overwhelmingly employed for the purposes of private rented property, has long ceased to be a genuine source of new equity for enterprise, and has become simply a principal means of tax avoidance for higher rate taxpayers? Is that not another example of what we have seen so often under this Government? For the great majority of taxpayers it is pay-as-you-earn, but for the privileged few it is pay-if-you-like.

Mr. Lamont: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The changes that we made to the business expansion scheme last year targeted it much more on small companies and, with the changes that have taken place in the equity and venture capital markets, I believe that that was the right change to make. The second change that we made was to target the business expansion scheme on the revival of the private rented sector. I am not at all embarrassed by the fact that £300 million to £400 million seems to have been invested in private rented accommodation because that is absolutely excellent.

Pensioners (Income)

8. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the post-tax income of pensioners since 1979.

Mr. Major: The average post-tax incomes of pensioners increased by 23 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1986.

Sir Trevor Skeet: I welcome those figures and the fact that the Chancellor raised income support substantially in the Budget for the over-75s, but will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the plight of pensioners who are on only the single state pension and have no savings?

Mr. Major: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. These days it is misleading to assume that most pensioners rely solely on the state retirement pension. At present about 50 per cent. of all pensioners also have an occupational pension and that proportion rises to about 70 per cent. of those who retired in the past five years. Those who do not have an occupational pension could either receive an earnings-related supplement to their state pension or be entitled to income support and housing benefit additions.

Mr. Shore: How much of the increase about which the Chief Secretary told us was due to reductions in income tax and how much was due to the secular increase in occupational pensions that has been taking place year after year?

Mr. Major: To give the right hon. Gentleman the precise figure I shall need to write to him.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Have not people who retired before the introduction of the state earnings-related pension scheme in 1978, without an occupational pension of their own, fared less well than the average? Therefore, will my right hon. Friend consider including in his welcome changes to the higher level of age allowance people of 70 and over to cater for all women who retired at 60 prior to 1978?

Mr. Major: The principal problem that my hon. Friend outlines has been dealt with in the package for poorer pensioners that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced some months ago. It comes into effect from October this year and will provide an extra £2·50 for single pensioners who qualify and £3·50 for couples.

Balance of Payments

9. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the balance of payments deficit will begin to fall as a percentage of gross domestic product.

14. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the balance of payments deficit will begin to fall as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Lawson: Probably this year.

Mr. Garrett: Does the Chancellor agree that the balance of payments deficit was 1·7 per cent. of GDP in 1979 and 4·4 per cent. of GDP in 1988? Does he further agree that we have become a country that imports capital goods and exports oil, and is that not characteristic of an underdeveloped economy?

Mr. Lawson: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on pretty well all counts. His figures for the balance of payments current account deficit in 1988—it was 3·2 per cent. of GDP, not the 4·4 per cent. It is 3·2 per cent. That, of course, is a high figure but it is worth bearing in mind that the United States has had a current account deficit averaging over 3 per cent. for the past five years.

As for the imports of capital goods, there the hon. Member is right. There has been a substantial increase in the imports of capital goods and that has been the counterpart of the massive investment boom which has been going on throughout British industry and which will stand us in very good stead in the future.

Mr. Galbraith: Has the Chancellor read the report of the Institute of National Economics which states that

Britain's deficit is in a class by itself and is likely to reach £44 billion by 1992? What will the Chancellor do to prevent than horrendous outcome?

Mr. Lawson: The statement by the organisation to which the hon. Member referred is wrong as, if the hon. Member would listen to what I said, the Americans have had a current account deficit of this order as a percentage of gross domestic product for the past five years——

Mr. John Smith: The right hon. Gentleman criticised them.

Mr. Lawson: —which I have not criticised. I am happy to answer questions from the Opposition Front Bench from a sedentary position since they have been put. I have criticised them for their budget deficit, not for their current account deficit. So it is certainly not in a class of its own, but it is obviously necessary that we get it down in due course and that is what we shall do.

Mr. Batiste: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the scepticism with which the statistics on which the balance of payments figures are calculated are treated in many quarters. Is he satisfied with the accuracy of those statistics? If not, what action will he take to improve them?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is right; the statistics are almost certainly inaccurate, as is indicated by, for example, the fact that for 1988 there was in the balance of payments a balancing item of £15 billion, greater indeed than the recorded deficit—and a balancing item is just a polite name for errors and omissions. We are concerned to improve the quality of Government economic statistics, and that is why the measures were announced yesterday involving a substantial reorganisation and enlargement of the Central Statistical Office and a number of other measures which, over time, will lead, I believe, to an improvement in the quality of statistics.

Having said that, it is a balance that has to be drawn between the burdens on business—the burdens that are put on business through the collection of statistics—and getting the full amount of statistics; and also, now that the economy is a much more complex, more service-based economy, it is genuinely harder to get statistics of the quality that we had in the past. Clearly, we have got to do better, and the announcement yesterday is designed to do just that.

Sir Richard Body: Will my right hon. Friend explain how there can be both a balance and a deficit? Surely the balance of payments deficit on current account is matched exactly by a capital account surplus, which may well be to our advantage?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Part of the point that I was making was that if my hon. Friend looks at the officially recorded figures he will see that there is a substantial deficit on the current account in 1988 but equally there is a recorded capital outflow, which clearly cannot be the case. The two things must match and counteract. Of course, my hon. Friend is also right that the overseas savings which are coming to the United Kingdom to finance investment here—because they feel that this is a very good place to invest—are extremely welcome and will strengthen the British economy.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Since the high pound and the high level of interest rates are a disadvantage to the balance of payments, are not the Chancellor's remarks quite unconvincing on how he expects to improve the balance of payments so long as these factors remain?

Mr. Lawson: I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman, even though he has at one time been a Treasury Minister. What has been happening is that domestic demand in this country has been running at an unsustainably high level, and one of the things that will happen is that the rate of growth of domestic demand will slow down and, as it slows down, import growth will slow down. That is one of the mechanisms by which there will be an improvement in the current account.

What the right hon. Gentleman is proposing, however, which is lower interest rates and a lower exchange rate, would probably have very little benefit, if any, to the current account. What they would do is ensure that inflation took off in a major way, as it did during the period when he was a Treasury Minister.

Mr. Gow: As forecasts and statistics prove so frequently to be made in error, would the world come to an end if we were to suspend both for a trial period of 12 months?

Mr. Lawson: I can assure my hon. Friend that in those circumstances the world would not come to an end. However, it might be a somewhat controversial measure to put before the House.

Mr. John Smith: Will the Chancellor tell us whether the IMF is wrong in predicting a £17 billion balance of payments deficit? Why should his prediction for 1989 be treated with any more credibility than his prediction for 1988?

Mr. Lawson: My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary answered that point earlier, when he pointed out that the IMF frequently gets its forecasts wrong. Indeed, it got its forecasts hopelessly wrong last year, just as all other forecasters did. If I may give advice to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is an up-and-coming politician, I suggest that, if he were to concern himself less with forecasts and more with what is actually happening in the British economy, he would do a great deal better.

Mr. Redwood: Will the Chancellor confirm that the £15 billion unidentified item may include substantial under-recording of exports? Is that not very likely given the completely out-of-date basis for the survey of the service sector which is now such an important component in our overseas earning capacity?

Mr. Lawson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and that is why one of the recommendations of the scrutiny report that came out yesterday, which he will have read, is to try to improve just that sector. It would certainly strain credulity to believe that the entire £15 billion balancing item is accounted for by unidentifed capital flows and none of it by unidentified flows on the current account.

Value Added Tax

10. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax was paid per annum by an average family in 1978-79; and what was the comparable figure in 1988-89.

11. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax was paid per annum by an average family in 1978-79; and what was the comparable figure in 1988-89.

15. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much value added tax was paid per annum by an average family in 1978-79; and what was the comparable figure in 1988-89.

Mr. Lilley: A married man on average male earnings with two children would have paid approximately 2·6 per cent. of his earnings in value added tax in 1979-79 and 4·8 per cent. in 1988-89.

Mr. McFall: Does the Minister realise that over the past 10 years the VAT paid by average families with two children and average male earnings had risen from £2 million to over £22 million in real terms, which represents a doubling of the VAT that people paid under Labour? Does the Minister not agree that this regressive tax hits the poorest people in society? When will he stop fooling the British people and his Back Benchers by chattering on about income tax cuts, when he is using the VAT sledgehammer to clobber the British people?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman does not appear to realise that since 1978-79, the take-home pay of a man on average earnings with one child has risen in real terms by 29 per cent., which takes account of all taxes. Under Labour that family saw an increase of less than 1 per cent. in its real take-home pay. The tax is not regressive, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. McKay: Does the Minister not agree that the £6·60 by which the average family would be better off if VAT represented a proportion of gross income, as it did under Labour, would be helpful to the average family? It would help to pay the mortgage interest that Government policies have increased.

Mr. Lilley: As I have just pointed out, if the average family had to go back to the level of income that it possessed under the last Labour Government, it would be in dire straits. One of the benefits of VAT is that families at least have some choice about whether they pay it. A high proportion of spending goes on zero-rated items, such as food and housing.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the Minister not realise that only an economic illiterate would argue that VAT is anything other than a regressive tax? Does he not understand the effect that it has on poor people, especially those in Scotland who have also been hit by that most obnoxious and regressive tax of all—the poll tax?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. People on three quarters of average income pay less than 4½ per cent. of their income in VAT; someone on average income pays about 4·7 per cent. and someone on one and a half times average income pays 5·1 per cent. Therefore VAT is clearly a progressive and not a regressive tax. That is manifestly obvious and were the hon. Gentleman in contact with his constituents he would realise that the less well off spend a much higher proportion of their incomes on zero-rated items.

Mr. Oppenheim: Given that VAT is not levied on most basic essential items, surely the figures merely prove that, under a Tory Government, people can afford more luxuries.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Under a Labour Government they would of course, be able to afford far less. It is sheer hypocrisy for the Labour party to show any concern about any tax because it is, after all, the party of high spending and high taxation.

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend will be aware that in the calculations of VAT in 1978-79 one major difference for many people was that the whip-round for the drinks and refreshments of one's opponents at sporting events were not VAT rated. That was brought in by the Government in 1982 and will be thrown out as a result of harmonisation. Why not do it in advance of that date?

Mr. Lilley: I know my hon. Friend's strong feelings about the impact that VAT has had upon Beaconsfield rugby club. I have dealt with the matter as best I can. I think that my hon. Friend has a strong case about the treatment that he has received and I apologise to him and his son.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Where is she?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

This morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presided at a meeting of the Cabinet. In the course of the day she will be having meetings with President Gorbachev. This evening she will give a dinner for him.

Mr. Alton: While the House will want to give a generous welcome to the remarkable improvement in the human rights record of the Soviet Union, will the Leader of the House take this opportunity to underline the Government's continuing commitment to the 400,000 Jewish refuseniks seeking exit visas and to the 4 million Ukrainian Catholics who have been outlawed since 1946? Will he make it clear that conditional on our attendance at the 1991 human rights conference is the Soviet Union's pursuance of a zero option to end human rights abuses and the renouncement of the sale of weapons to regimes that are opposed to this country's interests and the interests of other Western democracies?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's long-standing concern with those matters. The Prime Minister will, of course, be raising the whole question of Soviet human rights with Mr. Gorbachev and will underline the need for fundamental reform. The Foreign Secretary will be pressing the Soviet Foreign Secretary on a range of specific questions, including those raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Q2. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that when the Prime Minister is discussing human rights with the Russians she will raise with Mr. Gorbachev the case of Mr. and Mrs. Zolotarevsky [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] It is not the easiest name to remember. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the only wish of that pensioner couple is to be reunited with their daughter and granddaughter in Israel? Does he agree that it is wrong for the Soviet Government forcibly to divide grandparents from a granddaughter? Will the strongest possible representations be made?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be writing to my hon. Friend about this case. Although she will probably not have time to discuss individual human rights cases with Mr. Gorbachev, she has asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to raise that case with the Soviet Foreign Secretary.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Leader of the House tell us whether, when the person who leaked the inspectors' report on the House of Fraser is discovered, the culprit will be prosecuted, like Miss Tisdall and Mr. Ponting, or protected, like Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell?

Mr. Wakeham: I have nothing further to say on that except to remind the right hon. Gentleman that under this Government prosecution is a matter for the proper authorities and not for Ministers.

Mr. Cormack: When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is discussing human rights with Mr. Gorbachev, will she make it plain that we recognise that there has been a significant improvement in that sphere in the Soviet Union? While we expect intentions to be honoured and lived up to, we recognise that progress has been made.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes his point well. Certainly that must be part of the message.

Mr. Robertson: The Prime Minister was absent yesterday as well and she sent the Leader of the House to apologise to the House for the unavailability in the Library of promised documents on Namibia. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the key document, the report of the secretary general of the United Nations to the Security Council, on which the Prime Minister based her blame on SWAPO alone for the continuing violence in Namibia, is still not in the Library, and will not be in the Library because it has now been classified as confidential? As the Prime Minister specifically and categorically said on Tuesday that hon. Members could read that report, will the Leader of the House again apologise to the House and ensure that the report is put in the Library today?

Mr. Wakeham: If any apologies are required, they are from the hon. Gentleman for abusing points of order yesterday. That is not a matter for me.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the House must accept that the point of order was not out of order.

Mr. Wakeham: I withdraw what I said to the hon. Gentleman. I just noted that his point of order was somewhat long-winded. I apologise for saying what I did.

As I told the House yesterday, relevant documents have been placed in the House of Commons Library. They include the Geneva protocol which has been made public by the South African Government. A further set of documents, which together comprise the United Nations plan, will be placed in the Library today. The secretary general has asked that the report on the recent fighting be kept confidential for the time being.

Mr. Moate: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread concern about the internationally and nationally important national fruit collections in my constituency—*[Interruption.]*—which, despite the reaction of the Opposition, are of considerable importance to the country, and which were supported so vigorously recently by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the collections are threatened by the Government announcement of the closure of that fruit centre? Will he please ask the Minister of Agriculture to take no further steps until there has been proper consultation, including—if it is not too much trouble—consultation with the local Member of Parliament?

Mr. Wakeham: I am aware of the position in my hon. Friend's constituency. Final decisions on the closure of the Brogdale research station will not be taken until consultations with the industry are concluded. I shall see to it that my hon. Friend is included in the consultations. If research at Brogdale ceases, suitable arrangements will be made to continue the necessary work on the collection either at Brogdale or at another suitable site.

Q3. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Eastham: Now that the Prime Minister has returned from her tour of central Africa and is able to apply herself to some of the problems at home, will the Leader of the House draw to her attention the homelessness crisis in Britain and the recent statements by Shelter pointing out that thousands of teenagers, who have nowhere to sleep at night and are staying under arches and in doorways, are turning to crime, prostitution and drugs? What will the Government do about it?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that housing in this country is of a much higher standard than it ever was under a Labour Government. The Government have taken particular steps to help those who are worse off.

Economic Performance

Q4. **Mr. Goodlad:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the performance of the economy.

Q8. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the performance of the economy.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend receives a wide variety of representations.

Mr. Goodlad: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, as a result of the Government's management of the economy, the number of jobs in this country has increased since 1983 by 2·75 million—which is the biggest increase of any comparable period since the war—employment is now at its highest-ever level and that those trends are particularly reflected in the north-west of England and are set fair to continue?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The number of people in employment is at a record level—nearly 1 million higher than in 1979. Unemployment has been falling steeply and the figure is now more than 1 million lower than at the time of the last election campaign. The fall has been achieved in less time than the Labour party claimed that it would be able to achieve it—not that the British people remotely believed that claim any more than they believed the forecast of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that unemployment would rise after the Conservative victory.

Mr. Malins: Bearing in mind the importance of small businesses to our economy, does my right hon. Friend agree that we should take yet further steps to minimise the impact of the uniform business rate on smaller businesses, many of which—especially in areas such as Croydon, which has a good record on rates—face swingeing rises under the present proposals?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that the new arrangements will produce a much fairer distribution of rate burdens on commerce and industry. However, the changes are to be phased in gradually and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has proposed a generous level of protection for small businesses to give them plenty of time to adjust to the new uniform business rate.

Mr. Harry Ewing: The Leader of the House began his reply by saying,

"I have been asked to reply."

When the Leader of the House uses those words does he not worry greatly? Is he aware that, since 1979, all his right hon. Friends who have been "asked to reply" are either in the other place or have returned to the Back Benches? Where does the Leader of the House expect to be by October this year?

Mr. Wakeham: I am always delighted when my right hon. Friend asks me to reply to questions, particularly to those from the hon. Gentleman. However, my right hon. Friend told the Leader of the Opposition that she would not be able to be here this afternoon because she has made herself available to President Gorbachev—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wakeham: I think, perhaps, I have finished my answer.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is it not strangely incongruous that, while the Prime Minister warmly embraces Mr. Gorbachev in London and the chemistry is good, she is perfectly willing to build Trident missiles and point them towards the Soviet Union? Will the Leader of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What has this to do with the performance of the economy?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Prime Minister points them towards the Soviet Union and so may undermine the Soviet economy. What is the target? Is it the Soviet Union or Raisa?

Mr. Wakeham: If, on the 40th anniversary of NATO, the hon. Gentleman has not yet realised that over those 40 years a great part of the West's strength has been our defence, he has a great deal more to learn than even I thought.

Engagements

Q5. **Sir Richard Body:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Richard Body: If, as a result of Mr. Gorbachev's visit, my right hon. Friend believes that there may be more opportunities for expanding trade between East and West, would it not be advisable for Britain to play a more lively part in the affairs of the Economic Commission for Europe, which has been responsible for several hundred agreements and conventions with the object of bringing down trade barriers?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is right, but I think that he will also agree that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has played a most important part in just those discussions, and I am sure that all my right hon. and hon. Friends will join me in congratulating her on her achievements.

Dock Labour Scheme

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Norman Fowler): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the future of the dock labour scheme.

The scheme was introduced just after the end of the second world war under the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act 1946. An amended scheme was brought into being in 1967 and remains in operation today. It now covers 40 main British ports responsible for handling some 70 per cent. of our national trade. A further 35 ports are outside the scheme because they were not significant for cargo handling in the immediate post-war years.

The scheme is administered by the National Dock Labour Board and its 20 local branches which are made up of equal numbers of trade union and employer members. The boards have very wide powers to control employment in scheme ports, including the numbers employed and ultimate decisions on discipline.

Only those who are on the registers of the boards are permitted to do dock work in scheme ports. An employer who, without approval of the board, uses non-registered dock workers commits a criminal offence. The nature of the dock work itself and the exact areas where the scheme applies are subject to statutory definitions which have remained unchanged since the war.

The original purpose of the scheme was to ensure greater regularity of employment for dock workers. However, since then there have been radical changes in cargo-handling technology. Dock work today, by its very nature, requires a permanent and skilled work force. In ports where none of the scheme's restrictions apply, casual working, which was such a feature of dock work before the war, is very small. In big non-scheme ports like Felixstowe and Dover, it is effectively non-existent.

Over the last 10 years the number of dockers employed in non-scheme ports has risen by a third to around 4,000. During the same period the number of registered dock workers has dropped by nearly two thirds, from 27,000 to 9,400 today.

As the House will know, it is a major objective of the Government to remove barriers to employment and in the last year we have published two White Papers in this area. As part of this continuing process the Government have now reviewed the dock labour scheme and I am publishing today a White Paper which sets out our conclusions. In summary, we believe that the scheme suffers from a range of fundamental defects and that the time has now come to put the position right.

The scheme provides a statutory monopoly in dock work. No one other than employers and workers registered by the dock labour boards can engage in dock work. Given the changes in the nature of dock work, this is not only unnecessary but also totally at variance with the practice in any other industry. It has created two classes of employees in the ports—registered dock workers, and the majority of other workers—and it has certainly not secured good industrial relations in scheme ports.

Management is unable to manage its own work force effectively, and restrictive practices add to the costs of the ports. The public have to pay for the costs of the scheme, both as customers for goods that come through the ports, and as taxpayers. Since the early 1970s the taxpayer has contributed over £420 million, in today's prices, in payments for voluntary severance, the only means of reducing any surpluses of registered dock workers. A further £350 million of public money has gone to help certain scheme ports survive.

Just as important is the effect that the existence of the scheme has on prospective investment in scheme port areas. Companies are deterred from investing for fear that they will be caught by the scheme. The Government believe that without this constraint there would be more investment and more jobs in our ports and in their surrounding areas.

In short, the dock labour scheme today is a total anachronism. We rely on our ports for the bulk of our trade. We must ensure that they can prepare for the intensified competition that free movement of goods in the European Community after 1992 will bring.

The scheme will not simply wither away of its own accord. For that to happen, our great historic ports, as well as smaller ports all around the country, would have to close permanently. That would involve abandoning major facilities, with all their natural advantages of location and tidal waters, fixed assets and infrastructure, much of it provided at public expense over many years. Local business activity in port areas would suffer equivalent damage.

The Government have concluded, therefore, that positive action is needed to free the scheme ports from their present artificial constraints. Our intention is to bring all port employers and dock workers into exactly the same position as other employers and other workers. The only way in which this can be effectively achieved is through the abolition of the dock labour scheme. Its amendment or restriction would not remedy present defects, and would merely create new problems.

The Government therefore propose to introduce a Bill to repeal all the existing legislation connected with the scheme. The Bill will provide for the National Dock Labour Board to remain in being temporarily to transfer medical and training facilities as the industry requires, and then to wind up its affairs. The Government will assist financially—for example, by meeting redundancy payments due to board staff.

The legislation will also make special provision for registered dock workers. The Government are introducing a new statutory compensation scheme for anyone made redundant during a transitional period after the scheme is abolished. This will provide for individual payments of up to £35,000 until early 1991, and up to £20,000 in the following 18 months. The costs of these payments will be shared equally between the Government and the individual employer concerned. In addition, as soon as the Bill is enacted, dock workers will acquire all the normal employment protection rights which are available to other workers but from which they are currently excluded by virtue of the scheme.

The necessary Bill will be presented to the House tomorrow. As long as the scheme continues to operate, it will remain the biggest obstacle to a modern and efficient ports industry in this country. That is why the Government have decided that the time has now come to abolish the scheme.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that it is an act of wilful sabotage against this country's economic interest to plunge the nation into politically motivated strife in the docks, as his

statement this afternoon will do, in order to end a scheme covering only 9,500 workers? None of his allegations today remotely provides any economic justification for the abolition of the scheme. I will deal with it point by point.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about restrictive labour practices. How, then, does he explain that over the past 20 years productivity in scheme ports has increased by 700 per cent? There are not many industries that can match that record of productivity.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about job creation in British maritime industries. If he is really concerned about that, why does he not stop the far bigger job losses from allowing British shipowners to flag out their vessels to foreign flags of convenience?

The right hon. Gentleman talks about inhibiting port development. Why is he so blind to the fact that tens of millions of pounds are today being invested by employers —£30 million at Hull, £8 million at Tilbury, £10 million at Newport, £5 million at Bristol and similarly at Dartford —in new multi-million-pound terminals and huge new riverside ro-ro berths, all in scheme ports?

The right hon. Gentleman says that casual working is a small feature of non-scheme ports. How does he square that with the recent statement of Mr. Peter de Savary that he intends to open a new container terminal on the Isle of Grain with a return to the casual system because that suits his needs best?

How does the right hon. Gentleman justify the statement that the scheme increases port costs when, of the £7 to £15 per tonne charged by British companies, only 1½p can be attributed to the scheme?

Why did the right hon. Gentleman not mention that all our main competitors, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, operate dock labour schemes similar to ours? If they all believe that a dock labour scheme is essential to the efficient control of manpower and for good standards of training, medical—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be given a fair hearing.

Mr. Meacher: If a dock labour scheme is essential on the continent for the efficient control of manpower and for good standards of training, medical services and amenities, why is it not necessary here?

Is it not absolutely cynical of the Secretary of State to abolish a scheme which provides 3,300 training places a year, from induction courses to advanced cargo handling, in an industry desperately in need of modernisation and increased competitiveness at a time when he is exhorting the rest of industry to invest in training, which it is not doing?

Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, if there are deficiencies in the scheme, it is because of employers who increase standbys because of their reluctance to train their work force and who will not purchase the mechanical equipment needed for the proper use of their own manpower? Is it not the employers who have brought about the under-use of their labour force by indiscriminately releasing fully fit skilled men from the industry and by allowing the registers to fall below the levels required for a sound, safe and efficient service in the docks?

This statement has a great deal more to do with Thatcherite dogma than with any genuine concern with advancing Britain's economic interest.

Mr. Fowler: No one defends the indefensible as badly as the hon. Gentleman. All he appears to be in favour of is a museum economy in this country. On all the issues that he has raised he is typically wrong.

There is no question but that restrictive practices have reduced the productivity of scheme ports by devices such as ghosting, bobbing and demarcation disputes. If the hon. Gentleman does not know about that, he should look more clearly at the scheme.

The hon. Gentleman asked about employment. In the past 10 years, the number of registered dock workers in scheme ports has dropped from 27,000 to 9,400. Over the same period dock workers in non-scheme ports doubled in number. There is no doubt that the scheme deters investment to the great disbenefit of the port and the area around it. Companies are deterred from investing because of the fear that they will be covered by the scheme.

The hon. Gentleman is also wrong about costs. As far as we can estimate, it adds about 20 per cent. to labour costs and there is no question but that the costs of the scheme have been picked up by the customer and the taxpayer.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about casualism. I obviously accept and sympathise with points made about what the position was like in the past, but it is a non-issue today. Once again, the hon. Gentleman is fighting the battle of half a century ago. There is no evidence of significant casual working in non-scheme ports. No industrial action has been taken on that issue in ports such as Felixstowe and Dover, and it ignores the real requirements of modern ports in a capital-intensive industry.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about other Governments. I remind him that the Socialist Government in New Zealand are doing much the same thing to the dock work regulation scheme in that country. The dock work regulation scheme is a statutory monopoly. It is a criminal offence for an employer to employ anyone other than a registered dock worker. That cannot be right under modern working conditions. It is a historical anachronism that is bad for employment and means that management cannot manage. The scheme is out of date, as is the hon. Gentleman's attitude. We need to rid Britain of the scheme.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I thank my right hon. Friend for responding so effectively to the widespread Back-Bench opinion in favour of the abolition of the scheme. Does he appreciate that his statement will be welcome on Thameside and in other inner-city dockland areas because of the opportunities that will now open for the redevelopment of dock areas and the creation of far more dock jobs?

Mr. Fowler: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. I pay tribute to him for what he has done in the legitimate campaign against the dock labour scheme. There has been long discussion and much debate about the scheme and there is a growing consensus that it should be abolished. That consensus has been joined not only by Conservative Members but by some in the Opposition parties. One of the reasons for people wanting to see this scheme ended is precisely that which my hon. Friend has given. They see the prospect of development and new jobs and businesses being created.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that the Secretary of State has said that there is to be a Bill on this matter. I shall allow questions to go on until 4.15 and then we shall move to the business statement.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Many years ago Aneurin Bevan said that Conservatives or Tories were lower than vermin. Until today, I thought that that was an overstatement. However, on the basis of the disgraceful baying that we have heard this afternoon by Conservative Members, who have never been near a dock in their lives, I now think that it is true. Their attitude will not go unnoticed by the people of this country, because they are lower than vermin. I say that without any qualification. Is it not clear that the scheme, which has been in existence all these years, has given stability—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has every right to put his point of view.

Mr. Heffer: —to workers in the industry and to the industry?

Is it not absolutely clear that once the scheme is abolished there will be a return to casual employment? This is one of the most backward steps that the Government have taken. The Minister had better be quite clear that dock workers and those connected with them will resist this proposal in every possible way. I hope that we shall have a clear statement from my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench that once we get back into office, as we will at the next general election, we will introduce a scheme which operates in every port in the country.

Mr. Fowler: I will leave the hon. Gentleman to take up that issue with his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher).

I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that many of my hon. Friends represent constituencies which have docks in them. He must not think that he has a monopoly of concern on this subject. Under the scheme there have been job losses. Over the past 10 years, jobs have been reduced from 27,000 to about 9,000. Industrial relations have also been appalling not simply over one year or two years, but over 10 years or 20 years.

I repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Oldham, West about casualism. In non-scheme ports, casual working is minimal, and it scarcely exists in big ports.

With regard to the comments made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) about action, I hope that he—and if not he, then the Opposition Front Bench—will confirm that the proper place for the abolition of the scheme to be debated and decided is in this House. The hon. Gentleman should confirm my view that this is a decision for Parliament and say that he will oppose any steps outside Parliament.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have been advocating the abolition of the dock labour scheme for even longer than the abolition of the earnings rule for pensioners, and the achievement of both within a month is something on which the Government should be congratulated?

In the light of the remarks of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), will my right hon. Friend make it clear to those privileged few in the scheme who have benefited for so long at the expense of the consumer and taxpayer that the party is now over, and that the present he is proposing and its terms are, if anything, over-generous and should be enthusiastically accepted by those who must recognise that we cannot look to the past of our industrial relations but must look to the future of our economy?

Mr. Fowler: It has obviously been a good month and a good year for my right hon. Friend. I am not sure whether I would agree with him that our proposal is over-generous. I think that it is fair. We are proposing £35,000 for those with 15 years' service who are made redundant. That is certainly much more generous than any statutory redundancy provision in this country. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will recognise that this is a generous redundancy arrangement. Once the scheme is abolished, there is no reason why the ports presently covered by the scheme should not prosper and why new business should not develop. There is no reason why there cannot be more jobs, particularly in some of the inner-city areas.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Whatever the necessity for the scheme and its merits when it was introduced, the Minister will agree with us that it has outlived its usefulness. We welcome his announcement to end it. He said that there were two classes of employees in the ports. Does he agree that there are two classes of ports? His announcement today will give scheme ports the opportunity to develop, and it will also bring benefits to them.

As we consider the list of scheme ports, we discover that many are in areas of high unemployment. What analysis has the Minister made of the employment impact of this measure? Although the Bill is to be introduced tomorrow, will the Minister give an undertaking that there will be consultation with the industry, the unions and local authorities in the areas so that job opportunities can be created at the earliest possible opportunity?

Mr. Fowler: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments about the scheme and about the need to abolish it. I believe that they will be widely repeated and echoed throughout the country. The hon. Member for Oldham, West is entirely out of touch with public opinion.

As to jobs, I repeat what I said a moment ago. Without the scheme there is absolutely no reason why we should not see more investment and more business being created in these areas. The result will be more jobs and more employment. That is what I would like to see. I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): Does my right hon. Friend accept that all who use the port of Liverpool, which I had the privilege of serving for 24 years before entering the House, will be delighted by his statement? Will he confirm that a company such as the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, now that it is no longer the employer of last resort, will no longer be held back from investment in the port because of its position? It will be able to do the sorts of things about which it has been talking to my right hon. Friend's Department, attract trade across the Atlantic and take advantage of the land bridge to Europe from 1992. This is a good step for Liverpool and will be welcomed.

Mr. Fowler: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. When I was Minister of Transport between 1979 and 1981, I went to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board on a number of

occasions. There is potential there, and it is beginning to be realised at what is a first-class port. The ending of the scheme will be good for Liverpool and good for its port.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Minister tell the House why he is acting with such provocative haste by publishing a White Paper today and publishing a Bill tomorrow, when for years employers have been told that if they wanted amendments to the scheme they should be prepared to discuss them and to negotiate? Why is the Secretary of State being so provocative? Why is he prepared to risk confrontation, when there is not one word in the document, published only a few minutes ago, showing that there has been any discussion with the unions or with the work force? The right hon. Gentleman is taking away people's livelihood without giving them any opportunity to respond. If he has trouble, that trouble will have been caused by him and by him alone.

Mr. Fowler: Few subjects have been debated more over the past few years than the dock labour scheme. The issues are clear, and there is no question about what they are. We looked at halfway houses. I do not think that halfway houses exist. The hon. Gentleman talks about compromise and about discussion. Compromise and discussion were not forthcoming from the Transport and General Workers Union or in any of the statements—and I have a whole list of them that I can show the hon. Gentleman—from Mr. Connolly, of the union's ports section.

The hon. Gentleman asks, why now? The reason is that I believe that there is an emerging consensus in this country that the scheme should go. I believe that the public will support a Bill to abolish the dock labour scheme.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): As someone who has spent much of his life in this industry and has probably seen more ports and port systems than the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has, I greatly welcome the announcement. Seldom have I heard an announcement which I can welcome with greater sincerity, enthusiasm and conviction than this one.

My right hon. Friend suggested that, so far, the total cost of the scheme has been about £800 million, or £30,000 per docker, to defend what has amounted to the most indefensible, unjustifiable and destructive restrictive practices that the economy has known. Does he think that we should now spend what seems on the face of what he has announced a roughly similar sum to compensate those who are still there?

Mr. Fowler: There is a misunderstanding about that. We propose that people who are made redundant should be paid up to £35,000. That means that a registered dock worker who is made redundant would be paid up to £35,000. Obviously it would depend upon his length of service, but that maximum figure would go to those with 15 years' service. It is specifically not the proposition that every registered dock worker should be paid £35,000.

Mr. Alan Roberts (Bootle): Will the Minister expect cheering similar to that which we heard from Conservative Back Benchers when the Government announce getting rid of security of employment in the legal profession? *[Interruption.]* Is the Minister aware—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Interruptions take up a lot of extra time.

Mr. Roberts: Is the Minister aware that the scheme is not a bar to employment? It provides security of employment. It has created the successful, profitable port of Liverpool, in my constituency, a successful grain container terminal, and the only free port that the Government have announced which has been successful. That is directly because of the operation of the scheme and the dockers functioning through it in that free port. All that and the good industrial relations on Merseyside are likely to be destroyed by the Minister's statement. If Conservative Members do not think that there are good industrial relations in the port of Liverpool, they should talk to the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), because there are, and it is a successful port because of them.

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Gentleman started with a peculiar point about the legal profession. He may or may not have noticed that we have put forward proposals on the legal profession. His next two points were no stronger than that. There is no question but that the dock labour scheme is a barrier to employment. Apart from anything else, it prevents investment taking place in any of the scheme areas which will create employment. I will not deal with industrial relations specifically in Liverpool, but industrial relations in scheme ports have been bad over a long period—certainly for the length of the scheme since 1967—and they remain bad today.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in his Department's submission on the White Paper on expenditure, about £44 million of loans to the National Dock Labour Board must now be written off by Parliament? Will he confirm that that is taxpayers' money which will be lost? Will he confirm further that the port of Dover is self-financing and does not cost the taxpayer that sort of money?

Mr. Fowler: That is certainly the case. That decision has been taken. As has already been announced, in addition to the figures that I have given, employers are paid £125 million in cash—that is, over £200 million in real terms—to cover the cost of severance.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): As somebody who represents a constituency with a large number of dock workers, I cannot welcome the statement as enthusiastically as my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) did. Given that the Government have a commitment to regenerate the inner cities, how soon will the loss of jobs occasioned in London and elsewhere in port communities by the abolition of the scheme be compensated by increased substitute employment for those who may now find it difficult to get work?

Mr. Fowler: There is a great deal more chance of that happening without the scheme than under present circumstances. Much of the development has been in building. One reason for that has been the restrictions of the scheme itself, so that is one way in which the scheme will no longer have an impact. If one wants jobs and investment that use the skills of local people, one does not need the scheme. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that not only he but the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is in favour of abolishing the dock labour scheme. According to *The Scotsman* of 5 April, the hon. Member for Gordon said:

"It has now become a debilitating, restrictive practice."

[Mr. Fowler]

I agree with that.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that I have been advocating the abolition of the scheme not only for the past 10 years in Parliament, but for the 10 years previously when I was a councillor in Hull and then leader of the county council? Does my right hon. Friend accept that the abolition of the scheme will be welcomed in east Yorkshire? When I was a boy, Hull was the third port, but it has been devastated by the scheme. Now it is not in the first 10 and its container port has been closed as a result of the scheme. Will my right hon. Friend accept that we shall be eternally grateful that we shall be able to compete with Felixstowe on equal terms?

Mr. Fowler: That is right. I want to pay tribute to what my hon. Friend has done, said and campaigned for over the past years. On the last occasion on which I spoke from the Dispatch Box when he was here, he intervened in exchanges on the dock labour scheme. I hope that he is satisfied with the action we have taken.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): What we see today is what happens when little men grapple with big issues. The real intention behind the proposal is to bring down wages and conditions for workers in the docks. There has been no consultation, and no consideration has been given to proposals to extend the benefits of the scheme to the other non-scheme ports, which is the point at issue. Is this not just a decision that this is a time when the Government can afford to face a stoppage in the docks to cut the Chancellor's bloated import figures? The question that has not been answered today is, "Why now?" Why has the decision been taken after 10 years when there is an alternative? If the scheme had the consequences that the Secretary of State claims, it could have been referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which could then have held a genuine inquiry, not just an assertion of party political prejudice.

Mr. Fowler: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have heard me answer the question about why the decision has been taken now. Few issues have been more debated and more considered than the dock labour scheme. The issues are clear. There are no halfway houses available and, as the hon. Gentleman will know from his own experience, no compromise has ever been put forward by the Transport and General Workers Union and Mr. Connolly over a long period. For a range of reasons, the scheme is a statutory monopoly and an anachronism with restrictive practices and bad industrial relations. The case for repeal and abolition of the scheme is overwhelming.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Has my right hon. Friend noticed to what extent the little harbours like Teignmouth and Exmouth have prospered without the dock labour scheme, while the whole hinterland of the areas with dock labour schemes has been crucified by the strangulation of their ports? Is my right hon. Friend aware that I am satisfied that our ports can continue to thrive even with fair competition from those which are now released? Will that not give the reality of economic life to the areas previously strangled? Why are the official Opposition opposing the expansion of employment in the areas that will benefit from the measures that my right hon. Friend has announced today?

Mr. Fowler: The hon. Member for Oldham, West will have to answer that question for himself. What my hon. Friend has said is correct. The most significant feature of the past 20 years has been the fact that the non-scheme ports have developed employment, business and investment. At the same time, we have seen a real reduction in employment in the scheme ports. That is a significant contrast. My hon. Friend has put his finger on the point.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): If the scheme ceases to operate, is not the House and the country giving a charter for cowboys to chase a fast buck at the expense of their employees and of the country? If the dock labour scheme is a hindrance to progress, what about the stock exchange? Will the Secretary of State abolish that? Of course not.

In many ports, including Leith in my constituency, vast efforts have been made to improve productivity and conditions are good for the employees and for the employers. If the Government's proposal goes through, there will be a fight back throughout the country, north and south of the border. The people that I represent will say that the jobs are not to be sold, because they belong to the local community. The Secretary of State must take note of the fact that there will be a struggle.

Mr. Fowler: The first part of the hon. Gentleman's comments took us into areas which even his hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West did not seek to enter. The hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that this is essentially a decision for Parliament. We shall be putting a White Paper and a Bill before Parliament. A Second Reading will be arranged for the Bill in due course. It seems entirely right that the decision on a statutory scheme such as this should be taken here in Parliament. The hon. Gentleman will get little public support for the vague statements that he is making.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): In contrast to the comments of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown), does my right hon. Friend agree with me that his announcement today will be warmly welcomed by industry in Scotland because the scheme has caused great economic damage in Scotland, where an efficient port industry is of particular importance? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that recent events in Aberdeen have highlighted the absurdity and the total unacceptability of the present arrangements?

Mr. Fowler: My hon. Friend is entirely right. There is no question but that the Government's proposal will be welcomed in Scotland. The situation in Aberdeen is one of the anomalies that the scheme inevitably produces and Aberdeen, as well as Scotland as a whole, will welcome the change.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) mentioned my constituency, in which the port of Newport is situated. I wish that the attention of the House had been concentrated on ports such as Newport which has enjoyed extremely good industrial relations and a good degree of prosperity for a number of years. There has also been an increase and a heightening in the skills at that dock, which handles explosives. It has a marvellous record and was paid a tribute by Customs and Excise for its contribution

in keeping down the import of drugs into the town. The port also handles cargoes that can deteriorate in a short time.

The message that is being given today to the people of Newport is that this is not the act of a reasonable Government. The Government are to introduce a Bill without giving even 24 hours' notice. This announcement will come as a bolt from the black and from the darkness of the prejudice of a deaf and arrogant elective dictatorship.

One point will worry many dockers—knowing that the likelihood is that this proposal will be implemented. What protection will be given for the pensions of those who are involved in the scheme now?

Mr. Fowler: The proposals do not in any way affect the pension rights of registered dock workers. I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance straight away.

On the strike record, whatever the position in Newport, one point is absolutely certain—the scheme has not ensured good industrial relations. I shall give the hon. Gentleman two figures. Since 1967, when the amended scheme was introduced, we have lost more than 4 million working days because of disputes in scheme ports. Since 1967 there have been 3,569 disputes in scheme ports; and even today the number of days lost in scheme ports is three times the average for industry as a whole.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): My right hon. Friend will be perfectly well aware of the pleasure that I share in his at last recognising with me that not to have done this would have been the defence of the continuously and continually indefensible.As I made my maiden speech on the iniquities of the closed shop, perhaps my right hon. Friend could tell me whether he will make it a really good year this year and include that one as well.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Medway, a great port which has had to suffer a good deal from the loss of the dockyards, the workers will appreciate the chance to compete fairly with the non-scheme ports and will look forward to a continuing growth of that lively port industry in my constituency?

Mr. Fowler: I entirely agree, and pay tribute to what my hon. Friend has done over a long time in her statements on the scheme. Perhaps I may add in parenthesis that I already have proposals in a Green Paper on the closed shop.

My hon. Friend is quite correct: our proposals will enable ports like Medway to compete much more effectively than ever before. That is why I say that they will be good not just for non-scheme but for scheme ports. They will be good for industry and for employment.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): Will the Secretary of State note that the public at large may feel it the height of cynicism and arrogance for the Government to seek to reverse the mandates of two past Labour Governments while not having a mandate of their own to abolish the dock labour scheme? Will he note that there will be considerable unease tonight on Teesside where there is a dock registered scheme, where there has been steady expansion with the full co-operation of the work force and where there will be genuine fears that redundancy will be a passport to unemployment, which we have so often seen in the past?

I welcome the comments made by the Secretary of State in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) to the effect that the pension rights will be safeguarded but, when the Bill comes before the House, I can assure the Secretary of State that we shall do all we can to ensure full dockers' rights in the future such as they have had in the past.

Mr. Fowler: It is entirely open and sensible for the hon. Gentleman to say that in the debate on the Bill he and his hon. Friends will want to scrutinise the proposals and to make their own. The right and proper place for that to be done is in Parliament. The scheme is a statutory one. The debate should take place in the House and in Committee in the normal and sensible way in which we organise things.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): My right hon. Friend is to be warmly congratulated on announcing the abolition of a regressive, expensive and anachronistic scheme. Will he confirm that it has cost the country billions of pounds to maintain the dock labour scheme, that the scheme has deeply damaged investment in ports, that it has damaged employment in those same ports and that it has sent ships fleeing to mainland Europe to deal with their cargo?

Mr. Fowler: That is substantially correct. One of the effects of the scheme has been to bring development blight in particular areas where it operates. When the scheme is removed, one of the results will be more investment and the creation of more new jobs in such areas. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): May I make it clear to the right hon. Gentleman that we do not accept the case that he has put forward this afternoon and that we reject his statement about future investment in these ports and the risk of the reintroduction of casual labour? It is for these reasons, among others, that we will oppose the Bill.

Has the Secretary of State not totally failed to explain to the House why he has made this statement at this time, a timing which, according to a telephone call that I made this morning, makes it as big a surprise to the employers as it is to the union? Is it not hard to resist the conclusion that the Government have decided that, at a time when we have a huge and growing deficit on our balance of payments, it may be expedient to run the risk of a long stoppage in our ports?

Mr. Fowler: No, that is not the position, although I welcome the tone of what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) has said rather more than I welcome the tone of what the hon. Member for Oldham, West said.

I will repeat the position. Few subjects have been more debated than the dock labour scheme. The issues are very clear. It is a statutory monopoly. The fact that a criminal offence was created by this scheme is completely out of kilter with anything else in industrial relations today. It is bad for employment and investment, and it means that management cannot manage effectively. I believe that abolition of the scheme will lead to a better future for those areas that are at present covered by the scheme.

What I detected in what the hon. Gentleman said and what I welcomed is that those are matters to be debated essentially in the House. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will make that absolutely clear.

Business of the House

4.20 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 10 APRIL—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Electricity Bill (3rd day).

Motion on the Lord Chancellor's Salary Order.

Motion on the Medicines (Fixing of Fees Relating to Medical Products for Human Use) Order.

TUESDAY 11 APRIL—Opposition Day (6th Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Inadequate Uprating of Pensions and Other Benefits". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "Safety in the Construction Industry". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

Motion to take note of EC document on weights and measures. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion to take note of EC document on the driving licence. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 12 APRIL—Debate on a Government Motion on the Fennell report on the investigation into the King's Cross Underground fire (Cm 499).

Motion relating to National Health Service regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 13 APRIL—Second Reading of the Road Traffic (Driver Licensing and Information Systems) Bill *[Lords]*.

Afterwards Second Reading of the Atomic Energy Bill *[Lords]*.

FRIDAY 14 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 17 APRIL—Opposition Day (7th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject for debate to be announced.

[First Debate on Tuesday 11 April
Relevant European Community Document
4102/89 Weights and measures
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC 15-xii (1988-89), para 2 and HC 15-xvii (1988-89), para 1

Second Debate on Tuesday 11 April
Relevant European Community Document
10357/1/88 Driving Licensing
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 15-xvi (1988-89), para 1

Debate on Wednesday 12 April:
National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 396)
National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 392)
National Health Service (Dental Charges) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 394)
National Health Service (Dental Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 363)
National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 419)
National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 326)
National Health Service (General Opthalmic Services) Amendment Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 395)
National Health Service (General Opthalmic Services) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 387)
National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Amendment Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 517)
National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 393)]

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I thank the Leader of the House for his statement.

I shall refer first to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) at Prime Minister's Question Time. Will the Leader of the House make it his business to ensure that the report of the secretary general to the United Nations Security Council is placed in the Library of the House next week, as was promised by the Prime Minister on Tuesday of this week? Will he bear in mind the convention of which he and the right hon. Lady will be aware—that, when Ministers at the Dispatch Box quote from an official document, they should make that document available to everyone else? Documents that Britain receives at the Security Council must fall into that category, especially as it was not simply that the Prime Minister——

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): The hon. Gentleman did not listen to Prime Minister's Questions.

Mr. Dobson: I am talking about the business for next week. Will the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) contain himself?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will have his chance later.

Mr. Dobson: As the Prime Minister not only mentioned that document, but also told the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) that he could obtain all the details he needed from that document and that it was available, it appears that the burden falls on the Leader of the House to ensure that, in line with the conventions of the House, that document is made available to everyone.

In view of Sir Leon Brittan's recent confirmation of many people's suspicions of the degree of involvement of the Prime Minister's closest advisers in the leaking of the Attorney-General's letter on Westland, will the Leader of the House tell us whether the Prime Minister will come to the House next week to make a statement and to answer further questions on that matter, and especially to clarify once and for all who knew what and when they knew it?

Will the Leader of the House tell us when we can expect the long-promised and the equally long-delayed debate on student loans?

As there is mounting concern throughout the country about the threat that the Government's National Health Service review poses to the health care of most people, will we have an early debate in Government time to give the Secretary of State the opportunity to answer questions in the House rather than spending taxpayers' money roaming around the country on a Tory party political propaganda exercise?

On the subject of the Department of Health, when can we expect a statement on the Government's response to the Griffiths report on care in the community? The

Department has had that document in its possession for more than a year and surely it should be moving towards giving us some suggestion of the Government's intentions.

In view of the particularly precipitate way in which the Government have managed to come forward with a Bill to abolish the national dock labour scheme, when will they come forward with the Bill that they have promised and on which civil servants have been working for four years—if parliamentary answers of 1985 were truthful—to outlaw the buying and selling of human organs?

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) for asking me six questions about the business for next week. I wondered whether he might have found time today just to say "Thank you" to me for having arranged for the debate on the Fennell report, for which he has been pressing me and also for managing to fit in two Opposition days in the business for next week.

Mr. Dobson: They are not both next week.

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman had listened, I announced two full Opposition days in the business statement for next week.

With regard to the United Nations plan and the documents concerned, I told the House yesterday that the relevant documents have been placed in the Library. They include the Geneva protocol, which has been made public by the South African Government. A further set of documents, which together comprise the United Nations plan, will be placed in the Library today. The secretary general has asked, however, that the report on the recent fighting should be kept confidential for the time being. On reflection, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider that the right thing would be to respect the request of the secretary general. Obviously I shall look into the matter in view of the question asked, but I cannot promise that anything will be revealed at the present time.

With regard to the recent television coverage of a television programme, which neither you, Mr. Speaker, nor I have seen, I understand that Sir Leon Brittan made certain statements which he suggested did not add anything new to the position. That is as I understand the matter and, therefore, I see no need for any further statement on the position, which has been well ventilated in the past.

The hon. Gentleman knows that consultations are taking place about student loans and I believe that the right time for a debate on that matter would be later rather than at present.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is a need for a National Health Service debate and I agree that it would be right for the Government to find time for that. The exact timing of it is best left for discussion through the usual channels. I also recognise the consistency with which he has pressed me on the Griffiths report. I understand his disappointment that it has taken rather longer to deal with that matter than he wanted. We are giving active consideration to the report and hope to bring forward our proposals in the near future. We recognise the concern that our response should not be unduly delayed, but it is vital that we reach the right solution in this important area.

There has been some discussion between the Government and the hon. Gentleman's Front-Bench colleagues about the abhorrent trade in kidneys. If we are to make progress as fast as we can—both of us are agreed on that, I believe—it is probably best for those discussions to continue through the usual channels.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will know that, from time to time, I have asked questions regarding a ports policy for the United Kingdom. The statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment, who said that the national docks labour scheme is to be reviewed, obviously makes my question about a ports policy null and void. Nevertheless, there is a need not to demoralise the employees of certain ports, because I know that they will put their shoulders behind the new review. The port of Southampton was closed for a whole year in 1981 due to militancy. It is now working well. If we can persuade the Transport and General Workers Union to adopt a reasonable approach, there will be further co-operation. That can only do good to Southampton.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am grateful to him for his support for the way the Government are approaching the problem. With the inevitability of these matters, there will be plenty of opportunity for my hon. Friend to raise the issue constructively in the debates that we shall have in forthcoming weeks.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to come to the House next week to explain why those who were demonstrating in Whitehall today against human rights abuses in the Soviet Union were told to take down their placards before Mr. Gorbachev arrived, which seems to be almost a contradiction in human rights terms?

Secondly, given that we will debate the Lord Chancellor's salary next week but that we do not have a Select Committee on the Lord Chancellor's Department or on the Law Officers' Department, will the Leader of the House consider setting up an ad hoc Select Committee with powers to call for witnesses and papers to look into the Government's proposals for the reform of the legal profession?

Finally, when did the Prime Minister find out that the United Nations secretary general wished the report on the Namibian incidents to be kept confidential?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not in a position to answer the question about the placards in Whitehall, but I shall make inquiries and see that the appropriate answer is given to the hon. Gentleman.

I do not propose to set up a special Select Committee to deal with our law proposals. I believe that the right procedure is that which the Government have adopted, which is to issue Green Papers for discussion. We hope to get as many constructive views as we can. Then the Government will have to make up their mind how best to act.

I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's third question, but it was certainly not until after my right hon. Friend had said what she did in the House.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Can the Leader of the House tell us when the Second Reading of the Bill on the dock labour scheme is likely to take place? Is he aware that today's announcement will be warmly welcomed by the vast majority of people connected with and working in King's Lynn docks, who realise that the

[Mr. Henry Bellingham]

abolition of the scheme will lead to more jobs? It will also lead to much more cargo being handled at King's Lynn and will enable it to compete with non-scheme ports in East Anglia.

Mr. Wakeham: I welcome what my hon. Friend has said. The Bill will be introduced tomorrow and the House will have an opportunity to debate it in the usual way, subject to the usual conventions. I hope to make a business statement including the Second Reading of the Bill in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to two early-day motions standing in my name, numbers 672 and 673, concerning freemasonry?

[That this House notes, as reported in the book, Inside the Brotherhood by Martin Short, that most Right honourable and honourable Members who completed a questionnaire issued by Mr. Short in 1986 said that councillors, local government officers, civil servants, policemen, judges and honourable Members should be required to disclose Masonic membership; therefore urges the Select Committee on Members' Interests to make necessary arrangements for appropriate resolutions to be considered by the House to require Right honourable and honourable Members to disclose Masonic membership in the Register of Members' Interest; further urges Parliamentary journalists who are Masons to be required to make an appropriate declaration; and finally urges the appointment of an Ombudsman to whom public servants, including police officers, can make complaints of discrimination in public employment.

That this House congratulates Martin Short on the publication of his book, Inside the Brotherhood; notes that the honourable Members for Ilford South, Croydon South, Chichester, Erewash, Banbury and Belfast North told Mr. Short they were Masons; further notes that Mr. Short believes that the honourable Members for Bury South, Reading East and Keighley are Masons; and finally notes Mr. Short reveals the Masonic Lodge to which Right honourable and honourable Members, Parliamentary Officers and staff belong is called the New Welcome Lodge (5139) which was consecrated in 1929 and meets five times a year at Freemason's Hall in London, and that Parliamentary Journalists who are Mason's belong to the Gallery Lodge (1928).]

May I unusually ask the Leader of the House himself to make a statement next week in view of the support of more than 200 hon. Members from all parties for the proposal that hon. Members who are masons should be required to declare their masonic membership in the Register of Members' Interests? Will the Leader of the House next week ask the Select Committee on Members' Interests to consider the matter urgently so that the necessary motions may be brought to the House?

Mr. Wakeham: As I told the hon. Gentleman in answer to a written question on 3 March 1988:

"Any consideration of changes in the scope of the Register of Members' Interests or the Register of Parliamentary Journalists would, in the first instance, be a matter for the Select Committee on Members' Interests."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1988; Vol. 128, c. *638*.]

That is where he should pursue the matter.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the debate on the Health Service that he has promised takes place at an early date and allows us to discuss the proposed contract for general practitioners? I think that he will have noticed that it has not been received with unanimous rapture by the practitioners.

Mr. Wakeham: Whether that is within the scope of the debate is not a matter for me but for you, Mr. Speaker. I should think that my hon. Friend, with his usual ingenuity, will be able to make the points that he wants to make on that subject.

Mr. Pat Wall (Bradford, North): May I bring to the attention of the Leader of the House a recent report by John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, regarding serious underpayments in the national insurance fund and the social fund—in particular, an estimate of underpayment of unemployment benefit of between £34 million and £89 million? That is very serious because it affects some of the most deprived people in our society. The money was not paid because of an error by Government Departments. The Minister responsible, if he is not prepared to initiate a debate in the House, should make a statement on payment to the unemployed. He should give an explanation and describe what measures will be taken to rectify the matter.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not know whether this is the same report from the Comptroller and Auditor General as that which I looked at the other day. I thought that there had been errors in allocation of costs rather than beneficiaries going short of anything to which they were entitled. However, I shall investigate the matter and I believe that the Public Accounts Committee will also consider some of these issues in the near future. If something has not been properly answered, I shall ensure that it is.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the recent consultation about possible amendments to the Financial Services Act 1986. Will he find time for a debate on the subject, with particular reference to the role of merchant banks? Does he recall that in the debate on the financial services White Paper in April 1985, several hon. Members, including me, referred to the possible conflicts of interest in merchant banks, but subsequent legislation left out that aspect?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise that we shall have a debate in the near future but I shall certainly refer my hon. Friend's point to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to see what can be done in the future.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Does the Leader of the House recall a question that I put to him some weeks ago regarding early-day motion 395?

[That this House calls upon the South African Goverment to release Mr. Oscar Mpetha a 79 year old trade union leader imprisoned since 1980; notes that he had his leg amputated in 1983, that he is a diabetic with complications and was refused permission to leave prison in 1986 to attend his wife's funeral; believes that his imprisonment is solely due to his struggle on behalf of black workers and as a member of the South African Congress of Trades' Unions and as President of the African National Congress in the

Cape; welcomes Her Majesty's Government's representations to the South African Government on his behalf; and calls upon the South African authorities to release Mr. Mpetha as a matter of urgency.]

That is supported by 118 hon. Members. Mr. Mpetha, who is imprisoned in South Africa, lost his son last week when he was killed in an accident. Will the Government make urgent representations for his immediate release on compassionate grounds?

Mr. Wakeham: As I have said on previous occasions, the Government have made representations to the South African Government on at least five separate occasions. I shall refer the hon. Gentleman's point to my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Dr. John G. Blackburn (Dudley, West): Will my right hon. Friend give serious consideration to the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, published on 22 March, on the production, distribution and sale of beers in this country? It will have a widespread effect on the brewing industry. Many of the major breweries are established in the midlands and there is a wave of uncertainty running through the industry. I should value it if my right hon. Friend would give an assurance that there will be a debate on this important subject.

Mr. Wakeham: It is an important subject and, in another capacity, as chairman of the Government's committee on the misuse of alcohol, I know that changes in the structure of the brewing industry are important for us to consider. However, many of my Government colleagues are also considering the matter, so it is being carefully examined.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): In light of the fact that Mr. Tiny Rowland has repeatedly used the Lonrho broadsheet to call for the prosecution of the Al-Fayeds over their trading practices, is it not now time for the Government to review the decision taken in 1977, which meant that prosecutions would not be brought under section 84 of the Larceny Act 1861, section 19 of the Theft Act 1968, and section 7 of the Exchange Control Act 1947 or for conspiracy to commit breaches of the Southern Rhodesia (United Nations Sanctions) (No. 2) Order 1968? Is it not time to review the decision and bring prosecutions under all four headings against the owners of *The Observer*?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, questions of prosecution are not for me. He may or may not have a case on the reforms of such matters, about which he is knowledgeable, but I regret that, even if they were acceptable to everybody, I could not find time for a debate next week. However, I shall refer the matter to my noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I did not catch all of my right hon. Friend's statement, but may I draw his attention to the fact that during yesterday's sitting of the Select Committee on European Legislation the recommendation was made that a heavily amended draft directive on broadcasting should be brought before the House for debate before the common position is agreed? As that common position may well be agreed next Thursday, will my right hon. Friend look into that matter? This is an important matter, as the directive has been much amended since it was last debated by the House as long as two years ago.

Mr. Wakeham: I understand my hon. Friend's concern and those expressed in the debate on the original proposals in January 1987, most of which have been met by the latest draft directive on broadcasting. I accept that the proposal has changed, but there has been a debate on the subject and I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that the changes were largely foreseeable and will generally find favour in the House. We have a heavy business programme next week which I cannot easily alter, but I am having discussions with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office on the subject.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the need for a statement next week as a result of Sir Leon Brittan's further revelation, for which we do not have to wait until Friday night; we have already heard it on television and read it in the newspapers. There is a strict constitutional convention in Britain, which does not have a written constitution, that Law Officers' letters should not be revealed. Two Law Officers nearly resigned on the issue and we now find that two civil servants at No. 10 took it upon themselves to reveal that letter, self-authorised. Two basic questions arise: first, why did they do it, and, secondly, why have they not been removed from their posts for doing so?

Mr. Wakeham: The right hon. Gentleman, who has a reputation for objectivity in such matters, should look at the report of the Select Committee on Defence and the debates in the House at the time. If he does that, he will see that nothing new has arisen. These matters were referred to. If the hon. Gentleman is interested in names he should look at the Select Committee's report, which was published and debated a long time ago. All the issues have been well ventilated. There is nothing fresh or new in the statement made by Sir Leon Brittan, as he confirmed yesterday.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, if President Gorbachev had arrived 24 hours earlier and had used the Underground, he would not have been able to keep his appointments, like many other Londoners, owing to the most uncalled for strike by the drivers, and, according to a CBI report, if he comes in 10 years' time, unless he uses a helicopter he will not be able to move because London traffic will be at a standstill. Therefore, may we have a debate next week on the management of traffic in London, and could the motion include the possibility of a Minister with responsibility for London's traffic?

Mr. Wakeham: I was at the airport yesterday to meet President Gorbachev, when adequate road transport was available for him. However, I have every reason to believe that those arrangements were made regardless of whether there was a strike of Underground workers. I regret that, against the advice of the union, Underground workers took unofficial action yesterday. It would be much better if proper negotiations to settle the dispute were entered into without delay. On my hon. Friend's wider question about ministerial changes, I do not think that that is a matter for me or that it arises today in particular.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Will the Leader of the House make time for an early debate on the repeal of rent legislation which has brought about a fourfold increase in the rents in housing association properties in my constituency, which has been forced on retired people and highlighted so well in *The Scotsman* today? Will the right hon. Gentleman give time for an early debate on the plight of retired people in retirement homes?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman a debate, but I should be tempted to have one because I suspect that his analysis of the situation was not a particularly balanced one. However, the points he has raised about elderly people seem to be relevant to the debate that I have managed to arrange for Tuesday of next week.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the widespread concern in all parts of the House as a result of the tragic events on the Namibia-Angola border. He may also be aware that those of us who recall the record of the United Nations in Katanga do not exactly have the utmost confidence in the ability of that organisation to react expeditiously and impartially. My right hon. Friend may not be aware of recent reports that aerodromes for advanced fighter aircraft are being constructed on the Angolan border, and that specialist Vietnamese troops are being brought into Angola to replace the Cubans. In the light of these very serious events, may we have an early opportunity to debate this matter?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the importance of the matter, and I recognise my hon. Friend's knowledge of that area, based on many years' experience. I wish that I could offer a debate in the near future. I shall certainly bear the matter in mind, but I cannot give my hon. Friend a promise.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 44 on cosmetic experiments on animals?

[That this House is appalled by the failure of the Animals Act 1986 to prevent the testing of animals for cosmetic purposes; notes that in 1987 there were still 14,534 animals being used in cosmetic experiments and considers this totally unacceptable; and calls upon the Home Secretary to cease the granting of any further licences for cosmetic testing and furthermore to put a time limit on those existing licences for the same purposes.]

May I draw to his attention the fact that this is a completely barbaric and unnecessary practice, about which I have had very many letters from constituents? The early-day motion has been signed by more than 200 hon. Members. In the light of the feelings of millions of people up and down the country, will the Leader of the House make time for an early debate on this issue?

Mr. Wakeham: I have seen the hon. Lady's early-day motion. The term "cosmetic" covers not only beauty preparations, such as lipstick and perfumery, but hygienic products, such as toothpaste and anti-dandruff shampoos, as well as preparations to combat other problems, particularly for workers in industry. It is essential that all these products are safe to use and safe to produce. Safety testing, for mildness only, involves some use of animals. All applications for cosmetic testing licences are examined by the Animal Procedures Committee, whose first report, published on 6 December, describes the difficult issues involved and its approach to them. I cannot promise the hon. Lady a debate at the present time, but it is a matter that I shall certainly bear in mind.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I warmly endorse my right hon. Friend's decision not to waste any more of our time debating the Westland affair and its aftermath. Sir Leon Brittan, in his most recent remarks, has added nothing to what we knew already. He has not said anything that is inconsistent with anything said by the Government in the past. Although the endearing, but slightly barmy Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and his friends may have an obsession——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Gentleman can do better than that. I do not think that we will have "barmy" here.

Mr. Hamilton: It was a slip of the tongue, Mr. Speaker, which I certainly withdraw.

Although the hon. Member for Linlithgow and many of his hon. Friends are obsessed by this topic, the country at large has no interest in it whatsoever.

Mr. Wakeham: As I have indicated, I do not think that there is anything new to be debated or discussed, and I am glad to have the support of my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the Leader of the House suggesting that the recent statement by Sir Leon Brittan is in any way consistent with the evidence given, on behalf of the Government, by Lord Armstrong of Ilminster to the Select Committee? Is he saying that the Select Committee had any notion that there was explicit approval by two of the most senior civil servants? Would the Leader of the House feel it right next week to make a statement on his own position, in the light of the assertions by his hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley) in the book "Heseltine"—the unauthorised biography—page 153, that he was present on 4 and 5 January 1986 when there were discussions at Chequers on tactics in relation to the Law Officers' letter, that he was present on 18 December 1985, with Mr. Bernard Ingham and Lord Whitelaw, when the strategy was being discussed, and that he was party to the inner Cabinet decisions on 9 January? Can he confirm his hon. Friend's statements, which are in writing?

Mr. Wakeham: The last time the hon. Gentleman raised the subject in that form he seemed to have got stuck at page 153 of the book. I suggest that he finishes the book, but I do not think that anything in it will give him any grounds for saying that the Government have not been forthcoming and that there have not been proper inquiries. Nothing new has come out in what Sir Leon Brittan has said. There is not just my word for it; Sir Leon himself, said there is nothing new. I see no grounds for an inquiry.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend find Government time for a debate about the inadequacies of the law on travelling people, some of whom may be gipsies? Many of my constituents have suffered great invasion of privacy and often abuse, from these people, who just camp without invitation. The police find it very difficult to move them on under the current legislation. Will he find time for this debate at an early date and will

he ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for a White Paper on the Caravan Sites Act 1968?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot promise my hon. Friend a debate, but I recognise that this matter causes concern in quite a number of constituencies, including his and, as a matter of fact, mine. I wonder whether my hon. Friend might consider raising the matter on an Adjournment debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Would it not be appropriate for the Prime Minister to make a statement next week to try to explain to the House and the country how her private secretary and her press secretary could approve and authorise the leak of the letter from the Solicitor-General unless they knew quite well that it would be her wish that they should do so? The Leader of the House tells us that what was said yesterday by Sir Leon Brittan is nothing new, and all the rest of it, but does he not recognise and appreciate that what is at stake here is the Prime Minister's integrity and truthfulness? My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), although he has been mocked and baited by the Tories over this issue, has been absolutely right.

Mr. Wakeham: These issues were well and truly debated at the time and nothing new has come up. Whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not, that is the position. He might have got a little excited yesterday, but he really has missed the point. There is nothing new to discuss.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Will the Leader of the House take time to read the two contributions on the Westland affair by his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? If he does he will find that she suggested that her office had nothing to do with it. Sir Leon Brittan said yesterday quite categorically that Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell approved the action. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask his right hon. Friend to come to the House and make a statement on why those two close associates of hers have not resigned? Will she at the same time give us a full, factual, detailed account of this squalid matter of the missing letter?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman invites me to take a quiet moment to read all these documents and speeches again. I did that just this morning in order to refresh my mind because I thought that some of these matters might come up in business questions. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has not read them and I suggest that he should, because he would then probably agree with me that nothing new has arisen and therefore there is no need for a debate.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I have a two-part question. First, will the right hon. Gentleman give an assurance that the Prime Minister will make a statement to the House early next week on her discussions with President Gorbachev? Secondly, just in case President Gorbachev asked to see me, I thought that I would brush up on a video on nuclear disarmament from the Library, only to find after a short viewing that another Member wanted to watch the television, and I was chucked out of the room. That is not the first time this has happened. Can we make sure that there is a room in this place in which Members can look at videos to do with work?

Mr. Wakeham: Any time the hon. Gentleman wants to watch the television and he cannot find a place to do so, if he will drop me a note I will look into it immediately. I am very happy to assist him in any way on that part of his question. On the first part of his question, I cannot give any undertaking that the Prime Minister will be making a statement on her talks with President Gorbachev.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Surely the Leader of the House can and ought to give an undertaking to the House that the Prime Minister will report not merely to the press but to the House on this very important and welcome visit by Mr. Gorbachev. Does the right hon. Gentleman know that, while the Jewish community in this country unanimously welcomes the visit, it remains deeply concerned at the large number of Jewish families still not allowed to emerge from the Soviet Union in spite of the fact that there has been a most welcome change in the Soviet Union's attitude both to emigration and to the rights of Jewish people within the Soviet Union? In particular, there are families such as the Upspensky family, the Chernobilsky family and the Lurie family who have been waiting over 10 years.

I was disturbed to hear the right hon. Gentleman say that there was to be no raising of individual cases by the Prime Minister with Mr. Gorbachev. Will he please reconsider his remarks and his failure to assure the House that there will be a statement on both human rights and the allegations that have been made about the sale to the Libyans by the Soviets of long-distance aircraft, which of course would have amazing potential in the hands of somebody like Gaddafi?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not in a position to say anything about the details of the talks, which are still going on. What I said was perfectly sensible and fair. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will, of course, raise the general matters in her talks with Mr. Gorbachev, but it seemed to be the best use of the day for my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to raise the individual cases with him. As the hon. and learned Gentleman has great knowledge of, and long experience in, these matters and his contribution is acknowledged by hon. Members on all sides of the House, I certainly take seriously what he says. Statements in the House are governed by custom and practice and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will observe the normal customs in dealing with these matters. It is not for me to say at the Dispatch Box what she will or will not do. It is not the practice always to have statements after bilateral discussions.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Can the Leader of the House confirm that the two EEC documents on Tuesday will be debated for only one and a half hours each? If that is the case, surely it is an inadequate amount of time when dealing with the EEC bulldozer yet again imposing more legislation on the United Kingdom.

May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 670 and ask for a debate on it?

[That this House draws attention to the editorial, Vilest M.P. in Britain, in the newspaper Today of 5th April, referring to the honourable Member for Dover; notes its expression of grave concern at the growth of violence against women; and urges all honourable Members to set an example of courtesy and restraint, whether towards reporters, photographers or Spanish police.]

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

Then the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), referred to in the motion, will be able to explain how he falsely alleged that pickets at Dover—National Union of Seamen members sacked by P and O—were engaging in brutality and the double standard of the fact that the hon. Gentleman is accused by *Today* of beating up a woman photographer. That sort of double standard should be the subject of debate. At the same time, the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle), who has been engaging in fisticuffs with the Spanish police, can explain his position as a representative of the law and order party. Can the Leader of the House, in the same debate, explain why there is this extensive thuggery in the parliamentary Conservative party and has it anything to do with lager drinking on the quiet?

Mr. Wakeham: If we were to have this debate I am glad that I would not have to be in the Chair, Mr. Speaker. There seem to be rather a lot of subjects and I would not want to have to keep that sort of debate in order.

I confirm that the motions on Tuesday night on EC documents will follow the Standing Orders of the House. These matters have been agreed through the usual channels and, assuming there are enough speakers for the Opposition Day debate and that does not end until 10 o'clock, there will be one and a half hours for each of those two debates.

With regard to early-day motion 670, I cannot arrange a debate on that. Anyone who wishes to complain of assault can go to the police or deal with the matter in other ways. If I had to arrange a debate every time that occured or every time the hon. Gentleman made some wild allegations about my hon. Friends, we would never get down to all the important matters such as dealing with the levy scheme.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Unfortunately the Leader of the House does not appear to be aware of the seriousness of Sir Leon Brittan's allegations in the television programme. If the Leader of the House is saying that what Sir Leon Brittan said in that programme is acceptable to the Government, he is saying that the Government knew that the press secretary and the private secretary leaked the Law Officer's letter. If that is accepted by the Leader of the House, it is a staggering new development and gives rise to a serious situation.

Against that background will the right hon. Gentleman come to the House next week and explain why my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) can be named and suspended from the proceedings of the House for five days on a motion by the Leader of the House for what is now seen to be the truth? In what circumstances can the suspension be removed, and if there are no provisions for removing it can the matter be referred to the Select Committee on Procedure?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that we are making progress when the charming hon. Gentleman, whom the whole House respects, can talk so much rubbish in such a short time. We clearly recognise that it is not a question of the Opposition fox having been shot, because there was no fox for them to shoot in the first place. The allegations and problems that arose over what is known as the Westland affair were fully debated at the time. We had debates in the House and Select Committee reports, and nothing new has emerged in recent times to require any further discussion or debate about the matter. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are disappointed that that should be the case. That is why the Opposition put up the charming hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) to try to make something out of the mess in which they find themselves.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Could we have a statement or debate on the operation of regulations made under section 1 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984? After a four-year campaign by shopkeepers and residents in the East Park road area of my constituency, the city council established some laybys but, because of the provisions of section 1 of the Act, nobody can park in them until the double yellow lines have been removed. Under the terms of the Act it will take seven months to remove those lines. Will the Leader of the House have a word with the Secretary of State for Transport to see whether we can amend the regulations to end this absurd scenario?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not entirely accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but I certainly accede to his request to raise the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, and I shall write to him.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Prime Minister to come to the Dispatch Box next week to make a statement about the Namibia crisis and the implementation of United Nations resolution 435? The Prime Minister should do that because she misled the House on no fewer than three occasions on 4 April. She told the House:

"There is no provision in the United Nations plan for SWAPO to have bases in Namibia."—[*Official Report*, 4 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 15.]

That would be in contravention of protocol SI 13120 of 26 February 1979.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, the statement by the secretary general to the Security Council is not in the Library and is not likely to be put there because it is a confidential document. The implication about SWAPO and the impression given to the outside world by the House was based on that report which we cannot see, although we were told at the time that we would have sight of the document.

The third matter is about SWAPO being a signatory to the Geneva protocol. That is mentioned in column 15 of the *Official Report* of 4 April 1989. That is not the case. SWAPO is not a signatory to that and the letter from the leader of SWAPO to the secretary general did not accept the protocol, which had four signatories. Misleading statements were given to the House indicating a totally biased approach against SWAPO. This is a serious matter, because we are talking not just about the independence of Namibia but about matters that affect the whole of southern Africa. As I have said, the Prime Minister misled the House on three occasions and she should now come to the House and make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept that at all. We have discussed whether the documents were in the Library and I recognise that there was some misunderstanding. The first requirement is for urgent action to restore the ceasefire under the authority of the United Nations. We are active in promoting that. Secondly, it is important for

all parties to hold to the terms of the United Nations plan for the independence of Namibia and to the other international undertakings, notably the Geneva protocol. It has been suggested that there was a provision for SWAPO bases in the country. That assertion is based on proposals made by the then secretary general in February 1979. Those were overtaken by a subsequent agreement in 1982 by the parties involved to monitor bases in Angola and Zambia. That is why there is no provision in the secretary general's report of 23 January, which sets out his proposals for the role of the United Nations transition assistance group, for any SWAPO bases inside Namibia.

Points of Order

5.7 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I raise with you the procedures that were observed today during Prime Minister's Question Time? Some of us were rather puzzled about why question No. 4 was linked to question No. 8. It is unprecedented for questions to be linked at Prime Minister's Question Time, and the linking today prevented hon. Members from asking questions Nos. 5, 6 and 7. Today as always well over 100 hon. Members put down a standard question. Why should what is traditionally called the "closed question" be given priority? If this is the name of the new game, you are likely to be faced, Mr. Speaker, with hon. Members putting down questions in that way in the hope that they will be linked and will therefore obtain priority. Will you look urgently at this matter and advise the House, because if an unfortunate precedent has been set today it should be removed as quickly as possible.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I share his concern about this matter and have made my views known.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you make a statement saying quite clearly, not that you have views about the matter but that you will not accept linking of questions to the Prime Minister? You will see that later in the Order Paper there is another question identical in type and form to questions Nos. 4 and 8. Quite clearly conspiracies could develop to flood the Order Paper so that one party could dominate the Order Paper to the exclusion of other parties. It would simplify matters if it was understood that there would be no linking at all.

Mr. Speaker: The linking of questions is a matter for Ministers and not for the Chair. As I have said, I share the concern expressed about this matter for the very reasons that hon. Members have mentioned.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot say any more about the matter. I hope that it will not happen again.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I clearly recollect one of your predecessors intervening when questions near the top of the Order Paper were linked with later ones. That was about 10 years ago. The Speaker of the day intervened and stopped that practice. I note and I am grateful for the fact that you have made your views known, Mr. Speaker. May we have some assurance that your representations will be as effective as those of your predecessor?

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman's knowledge of the precedents of this matter is rather greater than that of those who advise me. I will certainly take into account what he has said.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have no strong views about these matters and I will seek to do whatever is in the best interests of the House. In his enthusiasm to show his great knowledge of this matter, the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) did not perhaps consider the Order Paper or the problem very carefully. If he does, he will see that whether what I did was generally acceptable or not, is one matter. However, there were three questions between questions 4 and 8. Two of them were reached and those hon. Members who asked them have no particular grounds for grievance. The other question was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) who, in spite of his question not being reached, seemed to manage quite well.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very busy day ahead of us. I have already made my views on this matter clear and the Leader of the House has accepted what I have said.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dobson: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is my understanding that under the conventions of this House it is accepted that, roughly speaking, Ministers can decide whether to link questions. However, there is a convention over and above that which states that the linking should apply only to questions which are likely to be reached. Many hon. Members, probably from both sides of the House, are very dubious about a development in which a question which was on the borderline of not being reached can be linked. Having been linked, other questions tabled by Members who came higher in the ballot were not reached. The House would want a general view and a ruling from you, Mr. Speaker, if Ministers are to believe that they can link one question with one which may be so far down the list that it receives a leg up and is answered when it would not otherwise be answered.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to correct the Leader of the House. Question 6 to the Prime Minister stood in my name and that certainly was not reached. Question 5 was reached, but questions 6 and 7 were not. Question 8 had precedence. That is what the argument is about.

Mr. Speaker: I agree.

Mr. Spearing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that when tabling questions, particularly about matters which are regarded as historic, a point is reached when it is questionable whether matters are new in relation to the events in question. My point of order is relevant to

[Mr. Spearing]

the courteous exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) and the Leader of the House.

The Leader of the House said that nothing new had arisen from the statement made by Sir Leon Brittan. I wonder whether you will allow the Leader of the House, through you, Mr. Speaker, on this point of order, to tell us where in previous exchanges in the House or in any Select Committee report the two civil servants named by Sir Leon Brittan are named as being responsible for the leak. Unless and until such a demonstration is made in this House now or in future, the assertion of the Leader of the House must be found wanting and questions can be tabled which otherwise would not be raised.

Mr. Speaker: It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman was not here—at least I did not see him here—during business questions, because he could have put that question to the Leader of the House then.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. A lot of hon. Members would take a different point of view and would be very grateful if you could protect the House from the turgid and continuous regurgitation of this boring and bogus historical issue which may be of rotting political interest to a small out of touch portion of the chattering classes, but the vast majority of the country could not give a tuppeny whatever about it.

Mr. Spearing: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a very long day ahead of us. If the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has a legitimate point of order, I will have to deal with it.

Mr. Spearing: I invite you, Mr. Speaker, on this very important matter, to ask whether the Leader of the House would be willing to demonstrate where these matters were made explicit—namely, that the two civil servants concerned were named in official documents and therefore there is nothing new. Unless that is done, the House may doubt the words used by the Leader of the House in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing).

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you explain why, in the statement on the abolition of the dock labour scheme, as the only Liverpool Member in the House who has Liverpool docklands in his area, I was not called?

Mr. Speaker: I can easily explain that. With the greatest good will in the world to all hon. Members, it would have been completely impossible for me to call every hon. Member who had an interest in the matter during the statement. It is a question of judgment on the part of the Chair to try to have every part of the country represented. I am extremely sorry for the hon. Gentleman. I called him during business questions and I thought that he might have raised his point then.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I am a great student of procedure in this House. I have sat here for endless hours without being the slightest bit interested in the debate—just watching you very carefully to see how you run the business. My interest in procedure has been heightened with my appointment as chairman of the Scottish convention on the constitution issue. I thought about asking to try your wig on, Mr. Speaker, but I had better not.

I have noticed in recent weeks that there is a new practice of the Chair calling Conservative Back Benchers after the Opposition Front Bench spokesman has questioned the relevant Minister—today it was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. For my benefit, can you explain what procedural advantage is gained from that?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter of judgment for the occupant of the Chair. One day perhaps the hon. Gentleman may have this very difficult job.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the eight motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Community Service Orders Rules 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 191), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Air Quality Standards Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 317), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments &c.

That the Health and Safety (Emissions into the Atmosphere) (Amendment) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 319), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Control of Industrial Air Pollution (Registration of Works) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 318), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Criminal Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 388), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Legal Aid (Scotland) (Fees in Criminal Proceedings) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 390), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Confirmation to Small Estates (Scotland) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 289), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Gaming Act (Variation of Fees) (Scotland) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 362), be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Gerald Howarth.]*

Orders of the Day

Electricity Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

New clause 7

ENERGY CONSERVATION

'. The Director shall have a duty to promote the efficiency and conservation of energy and in carrying out that duty shall in particular—

(a) ensure that public electricity suppliers take such active steps as, in his opinion, are reasonable to maximise energy efficiency and conservation; and

(b) set annual targets for improvement in energy efficiency for public electricity suppliers which he shall publish and on the attainment of which he shall report to the Secretary of State'.—*[Mr. Blair.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.17 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 12—*The Deputy Director General of Electricity Supply for Energy Conservation*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint an officer to be known as the Deputy Director General of Electricity Supply for Energy Conservation (in this Act referred to as the Deputy Director for Conservation) the purpose of carrying out functions relating to energy conservation and efficiency.

(2) The Deputy Director for Conservation shall have a duty to exercise the functions assigned to him by this Part in the manner which he considers is best calculated to secure—

(a) that all functions relating to the supply, generation and transmission of electricity are carried out in a manner that requires the most efficient use of electricity;

(b) that all functions relating to the supply, generation and transmission of electricity are carried out in a manner that requires the conservation of energy;

(c) that no new plant is developed unless it is proved to the satisfaction of the Deputy Director for Conservation that the required capacity cannot be met by additional measures of efficiency or conservation.

(3) An appointment of a person to hold office as the Deputy Director for Conservation shall be for a term not exceeding five years; but previous appointment to that office shall not affect eligibility for re-appointment.

(4) The Secretary of State may remove any person from office as Deputy Director for Conservation on the grounds of incapacity or misbehaviour.

(5) Subject to sub-sections (3) and (4) above, the Deputy Director for Conservation shall hold and vacate office as such in accordance with the terms of his appointment.

(6) The provisions of Schedule 1 to this Act relating to the director shall have effect with respect to the Deputy Director for Conservation.'

New clause 14—*Environmental Duties*—

The Secretary of State and the Director shall each have a duty to exercise the functions assigned to him in this part in a manner which is best calculated to preserve, protect and improve the environment and to this effect shall place on all licence holders a duty:

(i) to achieve target improvements, which shall be set annually, in the efficient use of energy;

(ii) to achieve target reductions, which shall be set annually, in pollution.

Amendment No. 117, in clause 7 page 6, line 17, at end, insert—

'(c) such conditions as the Director may determine which enable the holder of a licence to conform to pollution legislation through:—

(i) energy efficiency measures;

(ii) the expansion of alternative renewable generating sources;

(iii) a system determined by the Director which allows one licence holder to offset the reduction requirements of another licence holder.'.

Amendment No. 124, in clause 8 page 7, line 4, after 'supplier', insert '(a)'.

Amendment No. 126, in clause 8 page 7, line 6, at end add—

'(b) to promote energy conservation in the supply and use of electricity to his consumers.

Amendment No 128, in clause 8 page 7, line 11, after 'competition', insert 'and energy conservation.'.

In connection with this grouping, I am prepared to allow reference to new clause 17 which is an amended version of former clause 13. I have not selected it for a separate division.

Mr. Blair: The purpose of new clause 7 is to impose on the Director General of Electricity Supply a duty to

"promote the efficiency and conservation of energy and in carrying out that duty . . . to ensure that public electricity suppliers take such active steps as, in his opinion, are reasonable to maximise energy efficiency and conservation and set annual targets for improvement in energy efficiency."

New clause 14 supplements that by imposing a duty on the director general and the Secretary of State to set targets for improvements for the emission of pollutants.

We will debate energy conservation and more environmentally beneficial ways of generating electricity under this group of amendments. Later we will combine heat and power and discuss other matters relating to the environment. This is effectively "environment day".

I want to begin by referring to an intriguing press release from the Press Association the other day. It revealed that next week the Secretary of State will have talks with Soviet Ministers about energy use and the need to safeguard the environment. He will do that during his five-day trip as head of a delegation of top business men. I found it rather intriguing and not a little bizarre that he should go abroad next week to promote environmental concerns in the Soviet Union—matters over which he has no responsibility—while he does not take the opportunity to promote environmental concerns this week during the Electricity Bill debates, a matter for which he is directly responsible. It occurred to me that perhaps he was not acting so much in his capacity as the present Secretary of State for Energy, but in the capacity of a future head of the Department of Trade and Industry—a position he desires to occupy in future. Perhaps we will find out about that later.

The Bill is the most important single measure touching on the environment that we shall debate this Session, yet virtually nothing in it provides even the mildest encouragement to energy conservation, which is the biggest contribution to meeting concern about the environment that we can make. The new clause sets the Government a fundamental test of their sincerity. Is green just the colour of the Prime Minister's rhetoric—a passing flag of convenience to protect her in dangerous political waters—or is she prepared to match words with action and to stand up to the industry's vested interests? So far, from the evidence in the Bill, the answer is a resounding no.

Every amendment promoting vigorous action to conserve energy—they numbered about 30 in Committee

[Mr. Blair]

—has been defeated. Instead, we have a derisory and pathetic response of such inadequacy that it casts doubt upon the commitment of those who make it. We debate energy conservation against the background of a Select Committee report on privatisation that wanted the regulator to require public electricity suppliers to come forward with energy conservation schemes. We debate it against the background also of our European obligations to promote energy conservation. However, clause 3, which lists the director general's primary duties, does not include energy conservation or efficiency. They are only mentioned as a secondary duty, subject to the primary duties, in subsection (3). The Bill contains nothing specific.

If one examines the licences that will govern both the public electricity suppliers and the generators, one finds an alarming state of affairs. All that is said in specific terms about energy efficiency in relation to the area boards that will supply electricity appears in condition 18 on page 83 of the draft licence. Licensees—the area boards—will be obliged to prepare a statement of general information about electricity efficiency

"and make a copy of such statement available for inspection by members of the public at each of the relevant premises during normal working hours."

The notion that that is an adequate contribution to energy efficiency is laughable. However, we find that in the terms of the licence for those generating electricity—the Secretary of State or his hon. Friend the Minister will advise me if I am wrong—there is not one single specific duty in relation to energy conservation. It is scarcely any wonder that the Bill's existing provisions have provoked the ridicule of every serious environmental lobby group.

The one argument that is not available to the Government is that energy conservation does not matter. It is not disputed that energy conservation is important. The question is how best to promote it. The Government fail in terms not only of the test that we set them but of the test that they set themselves. That is of a piece in the policy of the Government, who cut the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office, ceased to allow home insulation grants, and scrapped industrial energy schemes. Soon, all that will be left is a massive television advertising campaign—the usual substitution of style for substance that has become the Government's hallmark.

It is vital that action is taken in respect of the greenhouse effect, for example, which may be small in its terms of global impact but is still of importance in relation to the electricity industry's emissions. Also, acid rain has been established as an environmental problem. What is unbelievably depressing about the Government's response is that they see in the evidence about greenhouse gases or acid rain, not an opportunity to promote environmental concern but a chance to make the case for nuclear power.

Those environmental hazards first came dramatically to public notice last year, although many people had known about them for a long time. The Prime Minister, in an interview in *The Times*, commented:

"Had we gone the way of France and got 60 per cent. of our electricity from nuclear power, we should not have environmental problems."

That statement is about as bold as it is possible to imagine. I do not know whether the Secretary of State will give the House the benefit of his views on that remark, but I can guess his views on the statement made subsequently by the Secretary of State for the Environment, who commented:

"There is absolutely no doubt that if we want to arrest the greenhouse effect we should concentrate, like the French, on a massive increase in nuclear generating capacity."

It need only be said that not only is such utterly impracticable—as to swap from coal to nuclear would mean building nuclear power stations at a rate that not even Lord Marshall foresees—but radioactive waste is itself a major environmental problem and one for which we have no easy answer at present. When people learned from television that nuclear reactors must be left for 100 years before final decommissioning takes place, it provided them with a considerable education in the environmental implications of nuclear power.

Even on the most optimistic forecasts, the demand for energy conservation will rise—at least in the short term. We are talking not about reducing that demand but rather how to reduce or contain an increase. That re-emphasises points that we made in Committee about the desirability of ensuring that before power stations of whatever type are built, it should first be ascertained whether it will not be more cost-effective—quite apart from environmental considerations—to put more money into energy conservation and less into new build. Under the proposed new clause, that aspect is one that the director general could consider. That is done in the United States and in Norway with considerable success, and it is difficult to understand why such planning should not be adopted in this country.

The amendment does not stop there. It would ensure that we promote not only energy conservation but environmentally clean technology. Later, we shall debate the subject of combined heat and power. At this point, I wish to raise a specific point concerning the future of the fluidised bed combustion plant at Grimethorpe, which is a subject dear to the hearts of many of my hon. Friends.

I understand from the *Financial Times* that a director of British Coal who appeared before the Energy Select Committee yesterday morning said that that project provides an opportunity to burn coal in an environmentally beneficial way, but that it is at risk because of the Government's refusal to come up with what is, by comparison to the sums put into the nuclear power industry, a small amount of money. He said that £11 million is still wanted, but believes that the Government will not make that commitment. In debating the new clause, it is entirely appropriate to ask the Government to make that commitment, and to ask what are their intentions in respect of a project that has widespread support and shows that the industry is prepared to take seriously its environmental responsibilities.

Earlier this week, four environmental groups—all of which have a long-standing commitment in the environmental field and are well respected—jointly urged support from all political parties for the amendments and new clauses that we propose. They mentioned many ways in which energy could be used more efficiently and to reduce environmental difficulties. Those proposals are at least worth examining. History has taught us that there is no possibility of encouraging a greater measure of concern for the environment unless one is prepared to interfere with the vested interests that wish to carry on burning energy in the least efficient way, which does not put care for the environment at the top of the agenda. If we are

serious about promoting environmental concern, it must mean intervening in the market place to do so. That is what the new clause would do.

Without obligations on the electricity supply industry and without legislative duties—in other words, without interference in the market place—the degree of care for the environment that we desire is simply highly unlikely to happen. If the House takes the environment seriously, that interference should not happen at the whim of industry but by the will of the people. If the Secretary of State was prepared to set aside market forces to protect the nuclear industry yesterday, why does he not set them aside today —this time for the good of the environment and the country as a whole?

5.30 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) may seek to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to discuss some clauses dealing with the conservation aspects of the amendments.

I shall refer to new clause 17, as Mr. Speaker said I could, because another version of the new clause was selected with this group yesterday. It is about rural areas. People in rural areas have a particular reason to be concerned about the conservation and energy efficiency aspects of the Bill. It is in rural areas that green field sites are sought for the new power stations which would not be needed if proper energy efficiency and conservation were applied. The race to find, buy and use green field sites could be halted if we had proper conservation and an energy efficiency-based policy were followed. Therefore, one of the first interests of rural areas must be that part of the new clauses.

Several other aspects must also be considered. One is the duty to supply, on which I dwelt yesterday. The weakness of the duty to supply aspects is only one of the problems that the Bill presents for rural areas. That is why my hon. Friends sought to incorporate into the Bill two deputy directors of supply, one to deal with conservation and one to deal with the particular problems of rural areas.

There are a series of such problems. One involves the compulsory purchase powers in the Bill. For example, the National Farmers Union remains deeply concerned that the private electricity companies will have compulsory purchase powers which have previously belonged only to a Government body—a nationalised industry—and will therefore be able to take from agricultural use land which is of agricultural and environmental importance in the same way that a public body was able to do. Draconian powers are to be in the hands of private companies. That is another matter in which a deputy director general concerned with rural affairs would have a role to play.

The Bill's most alarming feature for rural areas is that the electricity supply companies could choose to impose a higher tariff on rural customers than on urban customers. That provision would allow a private company a power which no public company would surely ever have dared to use. That is why it has not been an issue in the history of nationalised electricity.

Within the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board area, the common tariff—the right of every customer to pay the same tariff, regardless of where in the board's area he or she lives—has been enshrined in legislation and will continue to be so enshrined in the area of the north of Scotland electricity supply company. But in the rest of Scotland and in the whole of England and Wales, it will be open to the new electricity supply companies to choose to charge their rural customers more than their urban customers. It is common for commercial organisations to say, "It is costing us a lot of money to deliver to little villages and to go to the heads of valleys and supply goods. Therefore, we will impose a surcharge and charge them at a higher rate." That cannot be an improvement for such a basic commodity as electricity, which has hitherto—certainly since the war—been supplied by public service bodies.

The chairmen-designate of the new companies have given indications that they might not choose to use that power for the first five years after privatisation—but five years only, and not beyond that time. The very way in which they have given such indications suggests that they will seek to use that power. There was a trial run of the problem in the Isles of Scilly. From the consumers' point of view the outcome was rather satisfactory. At the end of the day, primarily because of EEC involvement in the provision of a new electricity service on the Isles of Scilly, it was determined that a differential tariff could not be required of consumers there. They have the guarantee that they will pay the same as consumers in the rest of their board area. We have the EEC to thank for that, not any provision in existing legislation or in the Bill.

Hon. Members should think of what the companies can do now. The company supplying north Wales could decide to charge Anglesey at a higher rate than the rest of its consumers. North Yorkshire consumers could be charged at a higher rate than the rest of the Yorkshire consumers. The company in the north-east could decide to charge Northumberland at a higher rate than Tyneside. The appropriate board could charge rural Devon at a higher rate than the city of Plymouth. Such practices could be tempting if companies want to load higher charges on rural consumers who have fewer alternatives. Those consumers will not have access to gas as an alternative fuel for cooking, for example, and therefore will not be able to offset any higher costs by turning to alternative fuel.

These are grave prospects for abuse of a monopoly at the expense of rural consumers, in the absence of any protection provision. They were not seriously considered by the Government when the legislation was framed. That is why we sought in Committee to build in a right or guarantee that there should be a common tariff and that there should be no discrimination against any geographical area. The Government failed to accept that. We said that there should at least be someone in the controlling mechanism—a deputy director, for example—with a specific responsibility to prevent boards discriminating against their customers on the ground that they live in a rural area. I fear that that will happen unless some such provision is incorporated in the Bill. That is why we will continue to press in the House and through our friends in another place that rural areas should be much better safeguarded than they are at present.

Mr. Peter Hardy: (Wentworth) Unfortunately and sadly, I must make an extremely critical speech about Her Majesty's Government's record in energy conservation and the environment. Last night, the Secretary of State said that the Government's approach was one of diversity to maintain security of supply. If the Government were keen to enhance the security of supply, they would not

[Mr. Peter Hardy]

have such an appalling record in energy efficiency and energy conservation. When I made that point last night, the Minister looked shocked. He should not be shocked. He should be aware that Britain's record is deplorably below those of other advanced European industrial countries. That is sad. We would not have needed a nuclear ring fence. We would not have had nuclear power stations if the Government had wanted to avoid the massive capital costs of such installations. It would have been cheaper to save that energy through proper energy efficiency.

I am sure that the Minister has seen the claim by conservation bodies that we could halve the present use of electricity by using new kinds of light bulbs, save three quarters of the amount of electricity consumed by freezers and refrigerators if modern technology were applied, and save two thirds of the electricity consumed by washing machines, not by having dirtier clothes, but by having modern, technologically advanced energy-saving electric washers. We could certainly reduce the energy required to warm our homes by at least 20 per cent. if we reached the standards which are the average in western Europe, rather than lagging so far behind. We have been in that position for a long time and the Government's response to the case for energy conservation has been to adopt the policy that, if the price is high enough, the brutal effect will be to compel people to insulate, conserve and act with energy efficiency in mind.

A little while ago, I was advised by some of the groups that do splendid work in seeking to advance those most in need in society of the comparative position of a four-bedroomed detached house occupied by people in comfortable circumstances who invested in conservation, insulation and energy efficiency, who had the maximum possible insulation and the most efficient and effective forms of heating. They could maintain their four-bedroomed detached home at a comfortable heating level for less than the cost incurred by many hundreds of thousands of elderly people living in little, old, drafty houses and having to spend a fortune on electricity for unsuitable appliances. From an economic as well as a social standpoint, the case for a much higher priority for energy conservation should have been adopted long ago.

I said that I would be critical of the Government and I hope that the Government will accept that their record on conservation and efficiency deserves condemnation. An even greater criticism should fall on the Government if the work of such people as my hon. Friends the Members for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) and for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett), in whose constituency lies the Grimethorpe research centre, is ignored and the centre is allowed to founder simply because the Government are not prepared to support it. The Government should understand that Britain's record in research and development is deteriorating and that this is one area in which international advances and economic benefit could accrue. I hope that the comments already made about Grimethorpe will lead to a more favourable decision, especially if the Minister takes note of the work of the Select Committee on Energy.

I may be more critical of the Government than ever in regard to the environment. The Minister heard me say in Committee—and it is worth repeating—that the words of schedule 9 in regard to the "preservation of amenity" sound attractive. They were attractive, forward-looking words of high quality prose and literary merit in 1957.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): I am not used to hearing praise from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted that the Secretary of State is taking credit for the words of 1957. Unfortunately, whereas those words were commendable in 1957, the record of Governments in the 32 years that have elapsed since suggest that we need a rather different approach. A mere reliance on words that have already been frequently ignored and which receive a deteriorating priority is not acceptable. The Government have included the words in a series of pieces of legislation far too frequently, but having used the words, far too frequently no relevant action has followed. I am reminded of the Government's approach in a series of ways. As the Secretary of State knows, I could continue at length in giving illustrations, but I shall illustrate my point by the examples of one current event and of another that took place a little while ago.

On 16 January 1989, as the Secretary of State knows —I am sorry if some of my hon. Friends have heard this before, but I do not apologise if Conservative Members have heard it before—at the centenary of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Prime Minister, dressed in green, made a splendid speech. In terms of literary quality, her words were as good as those in schedule 9. The Prime Minister advised us to protect our natural heritage and she expressed her disapproval of the fact that 120,000 miles of hedgerow had been destroyed in the past four decades. I was delighted to hear her speech. That afternoon, I presented the Hedgerows Bill and I thought that the Prime Minister's words would allow my Bill to succeed, but it failed because the Government blocked it. I wrote to the Prime Minister because she was supposed to have been converted to the cause of greenery and the environment. I shall not bore the House by reading out her letter, but I was somewhat annoyed when I read that she believed that other matters should be considered as well as conservation.

5.45 pm

The second incident is, perhaps more venal. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) was drawn in a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. He tabled a Bill in 1985 of considerable environmental relevance—the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Bill, which had six particular points in it. The Government disfigured the Bill by leaving only one of the points in substance when the Bill went to the other place. I mention that because when the Bill was considered in the other place, the five points that the House had removed from the Bill as a result of Government pressure were restored. The Government were then left in a bit of a dilemma. They had to decide what to do about the five Lords amendments. Grudgingly, belatedly and at the last minute, following the most concentrated telephone lobbying the House of Commons has ever experienced, the Government decided the following day that they would not oppose those Lords amendments. What was nasty was that later that day, the appropriate Department issued a press statement claiming the credit for my hon. Friend's Bill and describing it as a Government measure.

No doubt the Government advance that Bill as evidence of the fact that from time to time they have paid attention to the words included in schedule 9, but those words, lifted from the Electricity Act 1957, have been far too frequently ignored. They have been too widely disregarded by this Administration during the past decade for us to have any trust or faith that the words in schedule 9 will receive a response. That is why environmental organisations throughout the country are deeply worried about the Bill. They believe that when the Government finally complete the privatisation of the industry—and the transactions for the water industry give us no cause for relief of that anxiety—perhaps substantially into the ownership of those who have no interest in these islands, the environmental consequences may be tragic. That is why I hope that the amendments will be accepted. If they are not accepted here, I hope that they—or similar amendments—will be passed in the other place. I hope that when the Bill returns to this House, suitably amended, the House will ensure that it provides better arrangements and safeguards to assist the causes of energy conservation and the environment.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Since last September, we have become familiar with the Prime Minister's conversion to green, environmental issues and to beliefs that we did not realise she had ever had over the previous 10 years. The privatisation of the electricity industry was an opportunity for her to put some of those sentiments into legislation, because in dealing with the electricity industry, we are dealing with Britain's largest polluter. In terms of air pollution, it has no rival. It is responsible for about half our total air pollution, 73 per cent. of sulphur dioxide emissions, 35 per cent. of nitrogen oxide emissions and 40 per cent. of carbon dioxide emissions.

Surely the Bill could have given the Government the opportunity to legislate to improve their environmental record? However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said, there is nothing in the Bill on environmental protection, conservation, energy efficiency or cutting pollution. There is some access to information via leaflets that may be distributed, but we already have that because information on insulation comes with our electricity bills. If ever there was an opportunity to try to do something about conservation and pollution, the Bill was it.

In the past 20 years, conservation has had far too little attention paid to it by both this Government and their predecessors. However, conservation has a critical role in energy policy. It can contribute as much as oil, gas or coal and certainly far more than nuclear power to our energy needs. In that sense, it is properly described as potentially the "fifth fuel".

Over the next 20 or 30 years planning is vital because if we adopt strict policies on energy conservation it will be possible to double our living standards without any growth in energy demand.

Despite the Government's green claims, their record speaks otherwise. In the past few years the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office has been cut from £25 million to £12 million, giving the lie to the Prime Minister's green claims. In new clause 7 on energy conservation, we are asking the regulator to take measures to instruct the distribution companies to improve energy efficiency. We should like an annual energy audit and annual records kept to show how efficiency is being improved.

In Committee, we debated at length the idea of least-cost planning, which has been adopted in the United States. Instead of building more and more new power stations, it would be better to invest that money in home and factory insulation, in combined heat and power or simply in demand management to iron out the peaks in the demand for electricity in the evening and during the day. If we did so, we would not need such capacity to meet the demand.

Least-cost planning is very much in the consumers' interest. It is designed for consumers because ultimately it means that the electricity produced is cheaper. It aims for the lowest cost of electricity. Rather than consumers paying for the four PWRs or for new power stations, they would be paying for insulation, which is much more efficient. Such measures could be adopted in this country and new clause 7 would help the regulator to acquire those powers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) talked about energy efficiency and appliances, such as washing machines, refrigerators and television sets. He also mentioned light bulbs. It is possible to produce such things with between two and four times their present efficiency. In that context, one danger of the Bill is that the research work carried out by the CEGB may be cut. Therefore, in new clause 7 we are asking that the regulator be given powers so that conservation and energy efficiency become part of the role of the privatised industry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth also said that we have a sort of conservation policy at the moment. It is conservation by price. It means that in the winter pensioners, who often live in draughty houses, cannot afford to switch on two bars of their electric fires. That social problem applies especially to the poor, the elderly and families. It is a cruel kind of conservation.

Since 1973 energy efficiency has improved in the advanced countries by 20 per cent. I hasten to add that Britain is pretty well at the bottom of that league. Far more is possible, and our new clause asks that there should be action.

New clause 14 refers to pollution and environmental protection. Opposition Members acknowledge that coal is dirty. We realise that sulphur and nitrogen oxides and carbon dioxide are all by-products of coal combustion. However, they need to be and can be tackled. Sulphur dioxide and acid rain pose a serious problem. Acid rain is killing our trees and affecting water supplies and the tributaries of rivers in upland areas. The drinking water in my constituency has a high aluminium level, often in excess of the EEC limit, simply because of the problem of acid rain.

The Government's record on acid rain is appalling. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) was in Japan a few weeks ago and visited a power station that was built in 1974 and which had flue gas desulphurisation installed then. That was about 20 years ago but not one of our power stations has such FGD equipment. The Government did not recognise acid rain as a problem until 1986 and it was only then that they started to take some action. Under the present programme, none of our power stations will be cleaned up until 1997. We are dragging our feet. For years the Government refused to join the "30 per cent. club", and a 30 per cent. reduction

[Mr. Alan W. Williams]

by 1997 is now completely out of the question. The Government have agreed to a European Community directive to cut sulphur oxide by 60 per cent. by the year 2003, but that is now impossible under the Government's present policies. Nothing in the Bill will help to achieve those targets.

We believe that part of the regulator's role should be to monitor the amount of sulphur oxide, nitrogen oxide and carbon dioxide that is emitted year by year. The regulator should set targets for reduction in line with those of the EEC directives.

Clean combustion technology and the work of Grimethorpe was commented on earlier. It is appalling that the Government are placing such important long-term research in jeopardy. Grimethorpe is the power station of the 1990s. It is the way to produce electricity in the next century, yet under this Government that programme is threatened. I hope that we shall receive some assurance today from the Secretary of State that the money that is needed will be found. It is a small amount —£11 million—which is pathetic when compared to the money that has been given to the fast breeder reactor programmes and to nuclear power in general over the years.

There can be no doubt about the greenhouse effect being the most intractable environmental problem. I read in the *New Scientist* last week that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has now passed the 350 parts per million barrier. In was 290 ppm, but it is now 350 ppm. It has increased by 20 per cent. during the past century and it is increasing at the rate of an extra 1 per cent. per year. That could lead to global warming and to the climatic effects that we have all heard about. Exactly what may be implied there is not very clear, but it would be prudent to take action now on the greenhouse effect.

At last year's United Nations conference in Toronto on the global climate, Britain agreed with other countries to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. over the next 15 years, but we saw in Committee that the Central Electricity Generating Board projects an increase of generation of 25 per cent. over the same period and of 60 per cent. over the next 50 years. So our assurances and our promises to that conference were not worth the paper that they were written on.

The only way to cut those CO_2 emissions is by conservation. Nuclear power stations are almost irrelevant. Conservation is the answer, and that is where the two Opposition new clauses tie together.

I end by quoting something said by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield—it deserves to be a "quote of the week". In a recent article he said that in the 1970s conservation was about saving money; now it is about saving the environment.

6 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): It has been a joy to watch the greening of the Government over the past 12 months. I remember that in July 1984 the Government's delegate to an international acid rain conference in Munich, the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), did not even bother to turn up to present the United Kingdom's case and had one of his civil servants read out Britain's excuse for not joining the "30 per cent. club", despite the fact that the Government were well aware of the outrage felt at the time by Scandinavian countries at having to suffer the noxious and destructive effects of United Kingdom sulphur emissions. At the time, Britain's most notorious trained scientist, the Prime Minister, had decided that the evidence on acid rain was inconclusive and had forbidden right hon. and hon. Conservative Members to support any shade of green—although rumours abounded that a few were secretly wearing green underpants as a gesture of concern for the environment. They are now retrofitting green garments at a far faster rate than they are retrofitting flue gas desulphurisation equipment in the nation's power stations.

Nevertheless, I welcome the plan to retrofit 6,000 MW of coal-fired capacity over the next eight years. I also welcome the plan to install low nitrous oxide burners at the CEGB's 12 largest power stations over the same period. But I do not welcome the Government's continuing refusal to sign the Helsinki protocol to undertake the reduction of sulphur dioxide emissions or their trans-boundary fluxes by 30 per cent. from 1980 levels by 1993.

The Government's new air quality standards for nitrous oxides and sulphur dioxides comply with EC directives and are most welcome but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) has already said, the directed levels are unlikely to be reached by the dates set.

Retrofitting is one answer, but it has limited application and it is very expensive. What is needed is a general transformation in our attitudes towards the fuelling and production of electricity in this country, one which posits an altogether more imaginative and environmentally sensitive approach than is encapsulated in the present Bill. I am not trying to defend the status quo. The attitudes towards energy production of virtually all the interested parties over the past decade have been partisan, unimaginative and generally governed by a notion that energy conservation and efficiency, and environmentalism as a whole, meant job losses, additional expense and consequent political unpopularity.

The Bill strengthens rather than weakens that notion, and I commend new clause 14 as a measure which may encourage a different attitude towards the fuelling and production of electricity. The development and application of the kinds of energy technology already mentioned by my right hon. and hon. Friends might be encouraged—for example, the various renewable sources of energy, the greater efficiency of existing technologies, and moves towards the proper uses of materials with which we can make better use of our energy.

If we adopt this new attitude we shall see that environmentalism and efficiency will mean more jobs, not fewer. They may be different jobs, and that is a problem that the trade union movement must take on board, no question about it. If we support those new clauses we shall be doing a very constructive thing in that we shall not merely force the Government to act upon some of their protestations about being a green party, a party that cares about the environment; we shall encourage all levels of society to adopt a much more imaginative and realistic approach to the great problems of fuel production, electricity generation and the protection of the environment.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I have tabled an amendment calling for a deputy director of conservation.

It is my view and that of my colleagues that that issue ought to be at the heart of the debate about the Bill. It is very unfortunate that we have been diverted into a debate about nuclear power which, although interesting, has allowed the Government to avoid confronting the fundamental issue of how we can use energy much more efficiently.

Our record of energy efficiency is extremely poor compared with that of our competitors. It is difficult to understand why, given the number of times that Ministers have come to the Dispatch Box and claimed that they are in favour of conservation, we have fallen so far short of the objectives declared by the Government to be both achievable and desirable and to which they are committed. It is something that we really ought to take on board.

For example, in 1986 the Prime Minister opened the Milton Keynes energy week. She said that Britain's total fuel bill was £35 billion, which could be reduced by £7 billion. The Secretary of State for Energy tells us that the energy bill is £39 billion and could be reduced by £8 billion. In other words, nothing has changed except the figures, which have, in both cases, gone up. We have failed to achieve any significant move towards the reduction in energy use that the Government say they want to achieve and which they believe can be achieved.

I suspect that the reason is that the Government believe that it is not their responsibility, that the market will solve the problem and that it is up to everyone except the Government to take appropriate action. Given that this is one area where the Government and my colleagues and I share common ground, the Bill should have been seen as an opportunity. The common ground that we share is a complete dissatisfaction with the way in which the industry has been run over the past 10 or 15 years. It has been centralised and inefficient. It has over-invested. It has been generation-biased in the extreme; its response to forecasts of rising demand has been the desire to build more power stations instead of asking how it can ensure that the demand can be met with the existing capacity, because the technology exists to do that.

The irony—I may be giving the Minister the lead to his reply—is that it is cost-effective to invest less money to achieve greater profitability. It is true—I have some common ground with the Government on this—that the industry in the public sector has manifestly failed to grasp that issue, but I part company with the Government in that I believe that they can and should do a great deal more, and that the Director General of Electricity Supply should have been—and would be, if our amendments were carried—charged with a specific responsibility to promote energy conservation.

Significant benefits will flow from energy conservation. The first benefit is environmental. According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, investment in energy efficiency and conservation is seven times more effective than nuclear power in abating global warming. I do not believe that the Government will get very much mileage from suggesting that their nuclear programme is a contribution to dealing with the greenhouse effect. It is irrelevant. The programme, as promoted in the current state of the electricity supply industry and as endorsed by the Government as their future direction, will, in fact, lead to a 20 per cent. increase in carbon dioxide emissions from the United Kingdom by the end of the century.

It has already been stated that the original reasons for introducing energy conservation were financial and were connected with the oil crisis of the 1970s. At the risk of boring the House, I would point out that I wrote a pamphlet in 1979 in which I stated the environmental benefits and urged action to be taken. I regret to say that nothing has changed. My pamphlet is just as relevant today. The problems are even more severe, and no action has been taken to confront the issue.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): It has been recycled.

Mr. Bruce: It has not even been recycled. It has been shelved.

The second benefit from energy conservation is economic. It would lead to a cheaper unit cost of energy. That would be beneficial to industry and to our ability to compete in world markets. I hope that the Government would regard that as desirable, because at present we are not competing very successfully as a trading nation. That is possibly because we use energy substantially more inefficiently than our major competitors, Japan and West Germany. The Japanese use half as much energy per capita as we do and the primary energy consumption ratio to GDP in West Germany is half that of the United Kingdom. Therefore, effectively, it is twice as good as we are at using energy efficiently, which possibly explains why it is twice as good as we are at securing shares in world markets.

That benefit also has a social relevance as it helps to deal with the problem of fuel poverty. I worked for a number of years for a Norwegian-based oil and gas industry publishing company, and travelled to Norway fairly regularly during that time. I found it extraordinary that the issues of fuel poverty and condensation which are so alive in this country are almost unknown in Scandinavia. That is, first, because the Scandinavians have learnt that they live in a climate that requires a particular standard of building. They build to meet the climatic conditions and, therefore, they have houses that are fundamentally efficient and warm and do not suffer from condensation. Secondly, they ensure that their energy is relatively competitive. They have, of course, for a long time had the advantage of hydro-power, which has obviously been an additional helpful factor.

Perhaps the even more extraordinary situation is that investment in energy conservation would actually make money. The science policy research unit has estimated that every pound spent on conservation—this is not an airy-fairy proposition, but is based on spending money on existing conservation methods, which are specific and known—would save 38 kW, would cut carbon dioxide discharges by 42g and would save customers £1·90 each. Will the Secretary of State tell us what other investment in the United Kingdom could give a 90 per cent. rate of return? He must address himself to why we do not manage to achieve the target savings for which he has said that we should be aiming.

6.15 pm

The Association for the Conservation of Energy has recently carried out an analysis of some fairly simple measures that would produce significant benefits. It has assessed that simply by ensuring that lights, old fridges and freezers are replaced with the state of the art, best available technology, demand for electricity would be cut by 12 per cent. That means that it would cut the demand for electricity by the equivalent of four and a half Hinkley Cs.

[Mr. Bruce]

That reinforces the point that I have often made—that, if the electricity supply industry had any imagination, it would recognise that instead of spending money on wasteful public inquiries and the building of unnecessary power stations, it should spend that money on conservation, and thereby improve the profitability of the industry as well as reducing the cost to its consumers. That should be at the heart of the post-privatisation regulatory system.

In anticipation of the Minister's response—although I hope that I am wrong—I must say that it is not good enough to say that the figures I have quoted are so dramatic that once the industry is privatised the problem will solve itself. All the evidence from other countries shows that there must be a specific Government momentum behind the problem in order to solve it.

I know that the Minister is not enthusiastic about all its aspects, but the regime that has operated for a number of years in the state of California for promoting conservation and alternative energy required legislation, funding and tax benefits to ensure that it was stimulated. Once there was that framework, people were prepared to make investments because they were required to do so. They were astonished to find that under the regulation system that this Government so often denounce they were able to make greater profits than they would if they had pursued their desires in a free market, which was their initial wish.

The other sources of benefit are closer to home. The Select Committee on the Environment, when considering especially the problems of air pollution, stated:

> "However, if the world wants light, heat and energy in constant and increasing supply, the choice might resolve itself between a source which is deliberately and constantly poisoning the atmosphere and one whose misadventure would have catastrophic global results"—

that is obviously between fossil fuels and nuclear power—

> "but an alternative would be energy conservation and reduction in demand".

Energy conservation and improved energy efficiency is the absolute key to dealing substantially and significantly with the problems facing the energy industry of high costs and great environmental concern.

The proposals put forward by a variety of organisations have all reinforced that message. What should concern the Government now is how they will retain credibility as a Government who are putting forward the privatisation of electricity as an environmentally and economically beneficial measure, when all the indications are that without substantial action by the director general prices will rise, our competitive relationship with other countries will continue to deteriorate and the output of carbon dioxide and the aggravation of the greenhouse effect will continue to escalate between now and the end of the century.

I am led to believe that the Prime Minister is specifically concerned about the greenhouse effect and that that is her major environmental concern. Unlike many sceptics and cynics I welcome her conversion and believe it to be sincere. I believe that she has come to terms with the problems. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh yes. But I do not believe that she has appreciated that a commitment to deal with the greenhouse effect and the associated environmental problems is, unfortunately, incompatible with Thatcherism. When the Prime Minister discovers her dilemma I suspect that she may suffer a severe attack of schizophrenia. The one great thing about schizophrenia is that it reduces the patient to immobility and a little immobility on the part of the Prime Minister would, I suspect, be attractive to the majority of the country.

The market will not succeed in dealing with the environmental and economic problems of high energy costs and inefficiency energy use—that must be the duty of the regulator. The Director General of Electricity Supply—the regulator—may be correct in believing that the effective operation of the market may help to achieve a solution to the problems. He may consider that more information should be made available to people to enable them to make rational decisions which will be of economic benefit to them. If that is so, I wonder how the Government justify the reductions, and the forecasts of further reductions, in the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office. Its budget is small in any case and I believe that its role must be encouraged and intensified if we are to ensure that rational decisions are made by individuals and by companies in the private sector to take advantage of the economic benefits of investment in energy conservation. Surely the Government should do their best to make that happen.

It is not good enough to believe that market factors will determine the solutions to the problems. We need direct regulations. The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) has already mentioned "least-cost" planning. The Minister will know that that terminology has been imported from the United States where it is used as part of the criteria to assess operators' plans. When an application is made to build a new power station, the question asked is whether that represents the least-cost method of meeting the required capacity that the operator wishes to provide. Almost inevitably the answer is no. Using the same or a smaller amount of money to invest in energy conservation measures always proves to be more cost effective within existing technology. In other words, every pound or dollar invested in energy conservation will yield substantially more saved units of electricity than that same pound spent on investing on new generating capacity. It is a radical concept, but it works. The Minister should tell the House why he has not adopted that method here and why he does not believe that it is a good way of ensuring that conservation becomes central to our thinking.

Earlier, I noted that the Secretary of State nodded in agreement when I expressed my dissatisfaction with the way in which CEGB has worked as a result of its centralist mechanisms. However, the right hon. Gentleman has not said—even if he believes it to be true—how the proposed privatisation will substantially change the bias towards generation. The newly privatised industry will still say that demand is rising and that, therefore, new and bigger power stations should be built. I do not believe that we need any more capacity; what we need is more variety. We need greater flexibility and smaller-scale generation. That opens up all the market opportunities about which the Secretary of State and the Minister are so enthusiastic. If we followed that course there would be a great deal more enthusiasm for a privatised electricity supply industry.

Given that privatisation will take place and that the Director General of Electricity Supply will be appointed, I hope that he will have the power to pursue developments that will lead to greater flexibility. The new clause would help to achieve that aim. Without the new clause and the associated amendments I am not convinced that the Bill will ensure that the critical issues, which should be at the

heart of the legislation, are properly addressed. Even at this late stage I urge the Minister to consider the need to amend the Bill to put conservation at the heart of it. If he does that he will put on the statute book a Bill which, however controversial it is in other ways, will advance the electricity efficiency of this country by a marked degree and which will benefit every individual and company throughout the land.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): The House will be aware that in June 1988 the Select Committee on Energy produced a report arising from the White Paper and the subsequent Bill to privatise the electricity supply industry. I appreciate that there is not much evidence to suggest that the Government take a great deal of notice of the Select Committee reports, but I believe that we should be able to rely on the Government's observations on that report. If that is so, the Secretary of State should have accepted the new clause today.

No doubt the Secretary of State will recollect what the Government said about energy efficiency in paragraph 39 of the third special report on the report from the Select Committee:

"The efficiency with which the electricity industry uses fuel will significantly affect its costs, and hence its ability to compete successfully. The increase in competition which is central to the Government's proposals will provide a major incentive to the electricity companies to use fuel efficiently. The Government believes that pressure to find ways of increasing fuel efficiency to obtain competitive advantage will be an effective pressure for improving efficiency of fuel use in the industry. There will also be a general duty on the Secretaries of State and the Director to promote efficiency on the part of licence holders."

If that does not mean what new clauses 7 and 14 mean, I do not know what does. If the Government were genuine in their response to the Select Committee, what are we doing here today? The new clauses should be unnecessary as their provisions should already be a part of the Government's programme.

We have heard much about the greenhouse effect. At present the Select Committee on Energy is taking evidence about that. I wish that its report was available now, as it would provide a great deal of ammunition for this debate. The House will agree, however, that, unless such information is leaked, we must await the publication of that report.

Research and development have an important part to play in energy efficiency and the greenhouse effect. In paragraph 54 of the third special report, the Government, in response to the original report from the Select Committee, state:

"The Government accepts that its role in assessing long term energy R & D is an important issue. The nature of the programme overall will be determined by the inter-action of the industry's R & D programme with the Government's existing policy on R & D as set out in the 'Annual Review of Government Funded Research and Development'. The electricity industry has been asked to submit proposals for the organisation and implementation of research after privatisation and expects to receive these in the near future. When these have been reviewed it will be in a position to consider the appropriate role for the Government."

The Secretary of State may be in a position to tell us whether they have received that information. If so, what are the Government's views on it and what action will they take?

6.30 pm

We have recently heard much about the intentions of the Government and the Prime Minister to control the greenhouse effect. I wonder how serious those intentions are. The Secretary of State did not respond last evening to a question that I put to him about the Grimethorpe complex. He has had time to consider the question. The evidence given by Mr. Edwards of British Coal was that the Grimethorpe complex was under threat because the Government were not willing to provide £11 million for it to continue. If that is the case, how serious are the Government about efficiency and about research and development to protect the environment? Mr. Edwards told the Select Committee that if that scheme failed, very little other research and development would take place on the technology for sulphurised beds. *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State is talking to his colleague. I hope that he is listening to what I am saying because it is very important.

The Government's case is that nuclear energy is much cleaner. They have also said time and again that they believe that coal has a great part to play in the future of British energy. If they are serious about that, why will they not put money into research and development? If they are not serious about it, they should say so. If they do not want to put money into R and D, that may be why they are not keen to support the new clauses.

I hope that the Secretary of State will attempt to convince people that the Government are serious about protecting the environment and about coal having a part to play in the future of British energy. Will the Secretary of State give us an assurance that the Grimethorpe complex will be funded and that research will continue there?

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Energy efficiency makes economic and environmental sense. I do not think that proposition is opposed by Members on either side of the House. But all energy sources have an environmental impact. Burning fossil fuels contributes not only to acid rain but to the greenhouse effect. Nuclear energy produces radioactive waste which needs to be disposed of safely. The solution is not to transfer to renewables because to produce energy from wind farms we would need thousands of acres, and tidal barrages have detrimental environmental effects of their own.

The question is: how best can we achieve energy savings? Should we do it via the amendments under discussion, with their emphasis on a more direct and hands-on procedure, with more direction and regulation by the director general? It is ironic that at a time when the Government are seeking to remove themselves from day-to-day involvement in the running of the electricity supply industry we should be discussing amendments which would give future Governments the potential to get their hands back on the industry. Or should we achieve energy savings through the operation of a free market within the framework set out in the Bill for the privatisation of the electricity supply industry?

Whichever way we go, there are things that the Government can and should do. They have some influence, although sometimes one doubts it, with local authorities. I understand that the Audit Commission is to re-examine how local authorities in England and Wales manage energy in their own properties. The new initiative

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

follows an earlier study completed in 1985 which established that at least £130 million could be knocked off fuel bills. However, an initial survey of progress undertaken last year suggested that only a tiny proportion of the anticipated savings is being achieved. The survey found that only about 13 per cent. of the investment opportunities have yet been taken up on the energy management side.

The Government should also consider their own buildings. Of all public sector buildings, 50 per cent. or more are occupied by Government Departments. When the Back-Bench committee on energy invited a consultant from an energy management firm to talk to it, he pointed out that whenever his firm was called in on a consultancy basis to examine Government buildings and spoke to the Property Services Agency, it got short shrift and got absolutely nowhere. The Government have a direct responsibility to make sure that the doors are open to proper consultancy so that savings may be achieved.

What is happening in industry? To hear the CBI talk, one would think that putting up prices this year would have a serious effect on the performance of industry. A survey last year, I think, by March Consultants in the north-west region showed that savings of 30 per cent. or more could be achieved by business and commerce. Yet very little was done. Even when showed the possibilities of energy saving, efficiency and conservation, few firms bothered to invest the money necessary or to employ within their structure people who could deal directly with the problem.

Where will energy efficiency fit within the newly privatised electricity supply industry? Surprisingly, some interesting information has come to light recently. Only the other week Mr. Malpas, the chairman-designate of PowerGen, spoke to a meeting of the Fellowship of Engineers. He said that most national energy policies focused too much on how energy was generated and far too little on the concern for its use. When challenged as to how that view fitted in with making profits in a privatised electricity supply sector, he said that PowerGen was considering taking a leaf out of the books of many American power companies and positively assisting the introduction of incentive schemes to promote the installation of energy-saving measures.

If we turn to the American position, evidence was given at the Hinkley inquiry by a representative of an American company, the Bonneville Power Administration, which supplies electricity to five states in north-west America. The company indicated that it was spending some $700 million to help its consumers to reduce energy wastage. It said that within five years cumulative savings had already reached 220 MW, which is equivalent to a small coal-fired station, and predicted that by 2010 the programme would have saved 2,750 MW of electricity. When challenged, its spokesman said:

"We are in business. You don't spend $700 million on a passionate enthusiasm. You do it as a good business investment."

PowerGen is to be a privatised company under the Bill. The Bonneville Power Administration is not a public company; it is not state-owned but is a private company. These two examples indicate how in future the privatised electricity supply industry in this country could make a positive contribution to energy conservation and efficiency.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Is it not a fact that the Bonneville Power Administration was set up originally as a state corporation? Were it not for the requirements of the Public Utility Commissioners, who refused permission for the building of power stations, it would not have embarked on that course. What the hon. Gentleman says is right; having embarked on it, it found that it was profitable.

Mr. Moss: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making those points. Whatever the incentive for looking into energy efficiency, the proof of the pudding is that it has been achieved and it is possible for that to happen here as well.

The Government's budget for the Energy Efficiency Office has been challenged by Opposition Members. It is not just the size of the budget that is important; the effectiveness of the spending is paramount. We should consider energy efficiency as our fifth fuel, which has significant environmental advantages. The new structure of the electricity supply industry will encourage that in three main ways.

First, one of the director general's main regulatory responsibilities is to promote energy efficiency. Secondly, the area boards, in competition with British Gas, will have a direct interest in keeping down their customers' bills. They will also, in competition with British Gas, encourage people to switch to electricity which, for heating, will be far more cost-effective if the householder is, at the same time, encouraged to take energy efficiency measures. In discussions which I have had with them, area board chairmen see this as a positive contribution which will also help overall market penetration. Thirdly, competition in electricity generation will ensure efficiency in the use of fuels.

These amendments are irrelevant. Adequate energy efficiency measures are already well taken care of in the Bill.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Unlike the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), I am not convinced of the Prime Minister's commitment to green issues. For the Prime Minister, green issues seem to go along with the green outfits that she takes out of her wardrobe and wears on a number of public occasions. I have been to meetings where the Prime Minister has made a speech that is fine in terms of conservation and ecological issues. Unfortunately, when I come to the House, I find, along with many other colleagues, that some of the issues which she so warmly supported at public meetings are voted down by the Government or not given the Government support that they should receive. That directly contradicts the policies that she sets outside the House.

The Bill is one example of that. The conservatioin of energy must be crucial to any country, not only in reducing the greenhouse effect—a major need which has been identified by the Prime Minister—but in cutting costs, both for domestic and industrial users.

We all know of the damage caused to the environment by acid rain and the greenhouse effect, but, in a modern technological society, we also accept that we must have power. The CEGB forecasts that there may be a 25 per cent. increase in demand in energy in the coming years.

Rather than simply ploughing ahead to meet that demand with more power stations—whether nuclear or coal—we should try to absorb that demand by greater energy efficiency.

In contrast to the argument put forward by some Government Members, nuclear power is not the answer to meet the increase in demand. It has advantages, but it also creates a different sort of pollution—in particlar, radioactivity. High environmental costs are also involved in dismantling the nuclear power stations and handling the waste that they produce. Therefore, nuclear power stations will not cut down pollution.

The union that I represent has members in both heavy industry, including steel, and rural areas. The steel industry has made great strides towards reducing its energy consumption, which has helped to return steel to profitability. However, not all companies have taken the same progressive line and invested in energy use. Of course, it could be argued that it is in the steel industry's interests because it makes savings by reduced power bills. Nevertheless, many industries which are not under the same kind of pressure to save money could pass on the savings in energy costs to their customers. The new clause would give the director general a role in encouraging the necessary energy conservation.

Another concern of mine, which has been echoed in the Bill, is the differential rates in rural areas. If new power companies are allowed to charge differential rates rather than concentrate on efficiency and energy saving, they will take that option. Therefore, housing estates built in rural areas to meet housing demand could face extra charges and industries set up in rural areas to provide jobs could also face a penalty.

6.45 pm

The Secretary of State will be aware that environmental organisations strongly support this batch of amendments. They call not only for energy efficiency and conservation programmes—which, if all the various conservation schemes were implemented, could cut the peak demand by 70 per cent.—but for target-led reductions in the pollutants of the electricity generating industry, particularly carbon dioxide and sulphurs.

Apart from the obvious industry energy conservation, the director could encourage energy conservation in domestic use—including the installation of low energy light bulbs. In my house we have installed such bulbs in areas where they are used a great deal, such as the porch and downstairs. They are bulky, but they can be hidden by choosing the right shade and they provide considerable cost savings because they last longer than average light bulbs. However, many people are unaware of the benefits of these light bulbs. If more houses switched to them it would considerably reduce the power generated. At present, one fifth of all power is used for domestic lighting.

Energy conservation could also be encouraged in fridges, washing machines and televisions, the modern variations of which use less energy than their older counterparts. However, the benefits of those machines are not driven home to the consumer.

Home insulation is another important method of energy conservation. Danish standards are far superior to ours. I understand from a conservation organisation that, if we adopted Danish methods, we could reduce the CO_2 output by 510,000 tonnes every year—a significant reduction and a benefit to house quality standards.

There is no reason why the director should not have a far more interventionist role in advising house builders on the quality and insulation standards that they should use. There would be long-term benefits for us all—not least the people who buy the homes.

Research has been covered by other speakers so I shall not spend too long on it. However, as coal is our major power source—I believe that it will remain so for the foreseeable future, until there is more research into alternatives—I am disappointed that the Government have not shown greater commitment to the fluidised bed method of burning coal which is more efficient and cuts down on pollution. Another option involves biomass generators, which could be fuelled on fast-growing crops of willow, and could form part of an overall policy to reduce cereal crops and use EC funds to encourage farmers to grow biomass to fuel power stations.

More research and development is needed in district heat and power stations—perhaps domestic refuse could be burnt, which would not only generate power but would generate heat to towns and cities while reducing waste. I see nothing in the Bill to give the director and the power companies the sort of duty that the new clause proposes. The Government should welcome it in the spirit in which is is moved.

More consideration should be given to the design and environmental impact of power stations. It is only fair to give some credit to the CEGB which, when it put forward plans for the new Burton power station—not far from my constituency—devoted a large part of its planning application to an environmental impact study, designs for using the cooling pools, landscaping and the layout of the power stations. We all need power stations but they can be ugly and a great deal more can be done to make them blend into the environment and to use the considerable areas of land that accompany them in a positive way, encouraging and conserving nature.

The new clauses are progressive. The Government say that they are committed to a policy of environmental support; the new clauses will not only protect our environment and set targets to conserve energy conservation and reduce pollution, but could have long-term benefits for the competitiveness of our industry by encouraging it to take measures that will reduce its energy costs to the benefit of the community.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): The headline on page 2 of *The Times* today says:

"20,000 people a month joining green groups".

The crucial proposal in new clause 7 is the requirement to impose a duty on the Director General of Electricity Supply; in new clause 12 to require the appointment of a deputy director general of electricity supply for energy conservation; and in new clause 13, to require a deputy director general of electricity supply for rural areas.

Hon. Members have three questions to consider before reaching a decision on the new clauses. The first is whether the existing provisions are adequate; secondly, whether adequate provision has been made, or is likely to be made in other legislation; and, thirdly, whether the Government's record makes the new clauses necessary. I am talking not just about the Government's recent record, but about their earlier record. I propose to address each of those questions in reverse order.

I consulted the Library about the measures that Conservative Governments have introduced in the House

[Mr. David Tredinnick]

since the 1950s. In that time they have introduced at least 10 Bills affecting the environment. For the benefit of the House I shall list them quickly. There is the Rural Water Supplies and Sewerage Act 1955, which was amended in 1961 and 1973; the Clean Air Act 1956; the Litter Act 1958; the Noise Abatement Act 1960; the Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Act 1961; the Clean Rivers (Estuaries and Tidal Waters) Act 1960; the Prevention of Oil Pollution Act 1971; the Radioactive Substances Act 1960; the Water Act 1973 and the Control of Pollution Act 1974, which I must admit was started by a Conservative Administration but was finally enacted under a Labour Administration. That does not sound like the record of a Government who have been negligent in environmental matters since the day that I was born in 1950. It is a rather good record.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does my hon. Friend agree that, apart from the Control of Pollution Act 1974, which began its life under a Conservative Government, no other Acts of environmental significance were enacted by the Labour Government between 1974 and 1979?

Mr. Tredinnick: My wise hon. Friend is correct. The Opposition must take that record into consideration. How quiet they are now.

There are more recent measures to consider. There is the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. That is a great favourite of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), who I see has just come back into the Chamber. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution was set up by the Conservative Government in 1987 to improve the mechanism for the control of all types of pollution.

One of the great destroyers of natural beauty, flora, fauna, and geological or physiological features is acid rain.

Mr. Morley: At a recent meeting I and my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) heard the Prime Minister give a good speech on the need to protect hedgerows. My hon. Friend is the sponsor of a Bill which, for the first time, gives legal protection to hedgerows. Despite the Prime Minister's public commitment to that, the Government blocked that Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. This is a wide debate, but to include hedgerows is really stretching it too far.

Mr. Tredinnick: I shall try not to get too close to hedgerows, or hedgehogs.

There are several critical issues relating to pollution which I want to consider and see what has been done about them. The first is acid rain and the problems of sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide. Opposition Members say that the Government have been negligent in dealing with the problem of acid rain, but in 1984 the Government set a target of 30 per cent. reduction in total SO_2 emissions by the end of the 1990s. As the Opposition have said, the Government's commitment in terms of real money was £600 million. That is hardly being negligent. In 1987 a programme was announced to reduce NOX emissions by 30 per cent. by the end of 1990. Again, substantial investment in low NO_2 burners is being made to ensure that that target is met. That is hardly being negligent. I shall give way to the hon. Member for Wentworth, who is trying to intervene.

Mr. Hardy: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I always try to give way to hon. Members with something to say and I would have given way to the hon. Gentleman in past debates if he had sought to intervene, but I shall not go into detail on that.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to a number of pieces of legislation. For example, he referred to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and claimed credit for the Government for that. However, that Act was Britain's response to the Berne convention for which members of the Socialist group of the Council of Europe, in which I was involved, were responsible. It also consolidated a number of other Acts of Parliament, two of which I had contributed myself, and it embodied, as a result of considerable effort on the part of Labour Members of the Standing Committee which considered that Bill, many amendments which were strengthened by initiatives taken in the other place. I could go on at great length, but the Government had little to do with many of the Bills for which it is suggested they should take credit.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman could go on—I would not question that—but I would question what he has just said. The inescapable fact is that it was this Government who produced the Bill and saw it enacted.

7 pm

Secondly, there is unleaded fuel. Lead absorbed into body tissue can cause damage to the brain and other organs. It is quite remarkable and quite outstanding that this Government have taken the lead in Europe in setting targets for the introduction of lead-free petrol throughout the Community. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has again stretched the differential between the price of ordinary petrol and the price of lead-free petrol. What a wonderful thing that is. The Government have certainly engendered tremendous support in my constituency by adopting that policy. The promotion of lead-free petrol illustrates again a laudable commitment of which we must take note.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can help me and other hon. Members in our efforts to work out the relevance of his comments to electricity. Is he about to suggest that one way of getting round the problem of lead in petrol would be to have electric battery-operated cars?

Mr. Tredinnick: I wondered whether I should give way to the hon. Gentleman; now I know that I made a mistake in doing so. I am illustrating what the Government have done, and posing the question whether we should consider these amendments as desirable additional measures. If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would have understood that.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has moved the frontiers beyond Europe, where we have taken the lead in lead-free petrol, to the rest of the world in what she and the Government have done concerning the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect. It is a fantastic tribute to my right hon. Friend that she seized the initiative in getting 200 world leaders to London to thrash out the crucial issues concerning this very worrying atmospheric problem that affect the world. We saw six concrete achievements resulting from that conference. There was agreement on CFC controls; 20 more countries agreed to the Montreal

protocol, and there was a commitment from 14 countries, including China and India, to consider signing it; the countries of the EEC agreed to a total ban—and what an achievement that was. Of course, we are also promoting the substitute gases that are so necessary to replace CFCs.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that people who live in greenhouses should not burn coal?

Mr. Tredinnick: My hon. Friend is obviously thinking of the hon. Member for Wentworth.

I want to deal now with my last point. It concerns an item that the Government have addressed recently—research funding. When one looks at the record, contrary to what the Opposition claim, one finds that the Natural Environment Research Council has received a cash boost of £71 million over the period 1989-90 to 1991-92; that the British Antarctic Survey, which, of course, was responsible for the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer, is to receive £23 million over the same period; and that the public expenditure plans that were announced in November include an extra £2·6 million for the research programme of the Department of the Environment. That is hardly a poor record.

There is one other aspect that must be considered—the leadership of the parties, and who is doing most in environmental control. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is a scientist. I do not see many scientists on the Opposition Benches. There is quite a contrast between the way that my right hon. Friend tackles environmental issues and the way that the Leader of the Opposition tackles them. I am indebted to a Mr. Malcolm Grimston, of Trevelyan road, Tooting, who wrote saying:

"After the ozone layer conference Mr. Kinnock was on the radio. After giving grudging praise to the Prime Minister he went on about how deforestation in Brazil was causing extra carbon dioxide and methane to be released, and this was also damaging the ozone layer. This is rubbish. Carbon dioxide and methane don't attack ozone, though they do add to the far more serious greenhouse effect."

That is a pretty fair illustration of the lack of knowledge of environmental issues at the very top in the Labour party.

The Government's record, long-term and short-term, is good. Besides this Bill, they have acted in a whole range of areas to improve the environment, and, of course, we have better leadership.

Let me refer to the 20,000 people a month who are joining green movements. It seems to me fairly clear that for anybody thinking of joining a green movement the right way of spending money is to join the organisation that is most likely to effect change, and that is the Conservative party. The first priority should be to join the Conservative party, and the second priority should be to join the Tory green initiative, which has been set up specifically to channel the tremendous concern on this side of the House.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): I wonder how many copies of this Tory Central Office brief there are to spare. I should like to have one—perhaps, after the hon. Member has finished, the one that he is using.

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman chivalrously question my notes. I can assure him that I wrote them myself. However, if he would like a photocopy after the proceedings, perhaps he would like to meet me behind the Chair.

I have been asking myself whether the wording of schedule 9 is strong enough. I know that this is what exercises the minds of many Opposition Members—whether phrases such as "having regard" and "taking into account" are strong enough to ensure that the director general will put into effect the intentions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. At the 19th sitting of the Standing Committee, I raised the issue of the conservation of energy, as against the creation of energy sources. Some Opposition Members may find common ground with me when I say that it is essential that we keep very much in the forefront of our minds the possibility of cutting energy consumption. I cite in particular the dramatic numbers of people who are now interested in environmental issues. I say to my right hon. Friend that we really must keep at the forefront of our minds the possibility of cutting energy consumption.

Let me illustrate the point by drawing attention to a survey that was carried out in the north-west of England late last year. It was found that a 20 per cent. cut in energy consumption could be achieved at a cost of £1 billion. The cost of Sizewell B is £1·646 billion, and the cost of Hinkley Point £1·47 billion. I am not suggesting that these stations should not be built, but I am suggesting that there is a trade-off here that we should consider very seriously. I know that my right hon. Friend is considering it very seriously; what I hope to do is to reinforce his thoughts.

I come, finally, to the issue of how the alternative energies that are now coming forward—wind, wave and even plants as energy sources—fit into the scheme of this Bill.

Mr. Morgan: Sit down.

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), who has spoken so often in Committee, is obviously anxious to get up again. I have not had the advantage of speaking as often as he has, so I should be grateful if he would bear with me while I finish my speech.

I have received letters from organisations such as the Wind Energy Group—which is a British Aerospace and Taylor Woodrow company—stressing how the Wind Energy Group's MS3 can now generate electricity at a cost competitive with that of nuclear power. The director, Dr. Peter Musgrove, informs me:

"Given a fair price for electricity from wind turbines it is quite realistic to forecast the installation of up to 500 MW annually throughout the 1990s so that wind energy could supply several per cent. of our electricity needs by the year 2000."

He says that his concern is that the legislation now being drafted will mean that wind energy is treated unfairly in the context of nuclear energy. That is something that we have to guard against. We have diversity and we welcome it, and I am very anxious that the alternative sources of energy should be given a fair crack of the whip.

The Government have a fine record, in both the long term and the short term, but I ask the Minister to ensure that the Director General of Electricity Supply takes into account the environment, energy conservation and alternative sources of power.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I now know why the Government Whip would not let the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) speak in Committee. We would still have been on the first amendment if he had

[Mr. Frank Haynes]

allowed him to get up. He does talk a load of rubbish, he really does. In Committee, I accused him of being sensible, but I will withdraw that now.

It is really a great pleasure——

Mr. Tredinnick *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: No, I will not give way; the hon. Member has only just sat down.

It is really a great pleasure to have the Secretary of State in attendance during this very important debate. This is a very important issue and my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) did a first-class job in moving the new clause. He made it clear to the Government what should be happening when this privatisation takes place on the question of conservation and efficiency in the electricity industry. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his speech.

Hon. Members have talked about research in connection with the industry. That lot over there are guilty of cutting back on research, never mind what the hon. Member for Bosworth said about pouring in £70 million or so since 1979.

By the way, it is about time the laddie went outside to have his nappy changed, because he is still wearing nappies judging by the way he has been talking this afternoon.

Mr. Tredinnick *rose*——

Mr. Haynes: No, I am not going to give way. Stay down.

Since this Government have been in office they have done nothing but cut back here, there and everywhere, on research among other things. I remember one of my hon. Friends standing up seven or eight years ago and saying that the Aston university had lost 1,100 places under this Administration. That is in one university, and we are talking about people being trained and educated for the job of research, not only in the electricity industry but in many other industries. So I do not know why the hon. Gentleman made the comment he did, because he is completely wrong. I am correct; the facts are in my favour and I have the information I need from the people on the Opposition Benches who have sussed it out.

7.15 pm

When it comes to conservation, I know what the Government are after. It is not a question of conservation for people who are buying in to this marvellous industry and lining their pockets with gold—including foreigners.

The Secretary of State laughs. It is not a laughing matter; it is a serious matter. The Government will allow foreigners to pour in over our shores and buy shares in our electricity industry. This is how that lot go on. They are not bothered about the British; they are looking after the foreigners. That is why we have this argument down the road about Harrods. I am looking at this thing sensibly. The people of this nation are laughing at that lot the way they are carrying on. But they will not be in office much longer. We shall be moving across the Floor and we shall put it right; we shall put the electricity industry, as well as many other industries, right.

I have been in the Secretary of State's constituency. I should have told him when I went, but I did not, and I apologise for that. I went to have a look at the palatial property in which he lives, and he really does live in a palatial property. When I saw it I thought to myself that there were not many properties like that in my constituency, with all those poor old colliers that I worked with underground for 35 years. Some of them are living in hovels, and it is because of the policy decisions of the Conservative Government. We talk about energy conservation. The roofs are falling in and the Government have cut back on grants. We are wasting energy when the Government ought to be encouraging people to do something to their properties to conserve energy.

The Conservatives talk about efficiency. We have never seen anything efficient coming from the Government Benches and it is about time we did. It is about time Government Members livened themselves up as far as efficiency is concerned.

I have seen efficiency. I had 35 years of efficiency underground and I am proud of it. When I come into this place and find the Tory Government doing the things they are doing, I see no efficiency. But we will put that lot right; there is no doubt about that. They stand at those Benches and at the Dispatch Box bragging and boosting themselves up, but a lot of them will not come back to the House. We shall be on that side and we shall make all the decisions that have to be made.

When the Government talk about efficiency they mean less and less manpower. That is how they look at efficiency —more people on the dole, more profit for the rich to pour into their pockets. We have had a bellyful, we have had enough, and we shall change the system at the first opportunity we get. We shall do it well, and that lot will be sorry for what they have done to the people of this nation in terms of electricity, the poll tax, the Health Service—I am reeling these off as the hon. Member for Bosworth reeled off the Bills. I am reeling off all the wicked things that the Government have been doing since 1979. The lad only came into the House in 1987. He is getting an education this afternoon, as he did in Committee, and there is more to come. Until that lot go we will educate them on what they should be doing in the interests of the people.

We are talking about the Electricity Bill, which I hope will not become an Act, because I hope that the people outside the House will demonstrate quite clearly that they do not want what has been pushed down their throats, particularly on electricity, water and health.

I hope that the Government and the Secretary of State have got the message. I am pleased that the Secretary of State is here to listen to me. He said that he enjoyed my speech yesterday. I hope that he has enjoyed this one. I do not make fancy speeches for people to read in future records. My speeches come from the heart because I represent the people of Ashfield and I shall continue to fight on their behalf.

Mr. Wallace: It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes). There is certainly no conservation of energy in the spirited way in which he delivers his contributions, and I am sure that the House commends him for that.

Hon. Members have highlighted the great contribution that conservation of energy can make. Some examples have been given, not least by my hon. Friend for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) who highlighted the ways in which energy conservation can make a valuable contribution.

About eight or nine years ago somebody suggested that if all the money up to that time spent on Britain's nuclear industry had been spent on thatching roofs the amount of energy conserved would have been equivalent to the amount of energy generated by nuclear power. That example is by way of illustration rather than a prescription, but it underlines the great importance of energy conservation. It is important not only in terms of the stewardship of our resources but because of the benefits that it can bring.

It has often struck me as quite telling that many elderly people and people on benefit who receive benefit through the post could well save much money by the simple operation of insulating their homes. Such a policy has a strong environmental base. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon spoke about the importance of low-cost planning. A case can be made for that in economic terms, but it does not take into account the important environmental benefit.

I had hoped that the Government would be sympathetic at least to the ideas put forward in the Bill even if they were not sympathetic to the amendments and new clauses 7 and 12. We should have been able to hope for some positive response. If amendments were technically deficient, the Government could have said that they would bring forward correct ones in another place. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) put his finger on the real point when he spoke about the Bonneville Power Administration. He accepted that that company had shown what could be done through investment and energy conservation. In an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon said that that had not been done as a result of the company's own free will but that someone had had to prompt the company to do it. That is what is behind the new clauses.

Energy conservation has not been practised in the past and the record shows that it will not happen in future. We need someone to give companies a prod, and we propose a deputy director general of electricity supply who will be able to do that. That will ensure that the electricity supply industry takes into account the great savings and the contribution that can be made by energy conservation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke about new clause 17. We want to see a deputy director general of electricity supply with special responsibility for rural areas. I acknowledge that a common tariff will be charged throughout the area of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. That is welcome, especially in my constituency. Our new clause would add to the duties of our proposed deputy director a duty for boards to have regard to the social and economic requirements of the area served by the various supply boards. That requirement currently exists in the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board but it will disappear if the Bill becomes law.

The disappearance of such a statutory duty is regrettable. The Government have sought to justify it by saying that there will be a common tariff, and that is fair enough. Secondly, they have said that there are now other bodies charged with responsibility for economic and social development. Too much cannot be done to try to promote the economic and social development of areas with special geographic problems such as the Highlands and Islands. Most places in the Highlands and Islands are now connected to the electricity supply. It is fair to acknowledge that that has been done with assistance from the uneconomic rural development programme. However, some people are still not connected to the main electricity supply.

One of my constituents comes regularly to see me. In 1985 he was given a tentative quote by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board that it would cost £10,500 to connect him to the main supply. He was told that connection would have to take place at the end of the uneconomic rural development programme. More recently he sought an estimate and was told that the cost would be £60,000. I am talking about an elderly couple living in croft property in Orkney and the wife is an invalid. They have a generator but it cannot be operated for 24 hours a day and that means that they lose the benefits of refrigeration and night storage heating. It would be of great value to those people if their property could be connected to the mains supply. I agree that in some conservation areas planning permission is not likely to be given for overhead wires, and underground cables are much more costly. I do not know how anyone could reasonably expect an elderly pensioner couple to find £60,000 for vital supplies.

I am told that under the crofting grants scheme the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in Scotland can offer a £600 grant and a loan of £600. Clearly, that is not enough. I have asked the Minister of State, Scottish Office to see whether there is any way in which assistance can be offered. I wrote to him some time ago, but he has not yet replied. I do not criticise him for that because I am sure that he realises the seriousness of the problem although I doubt whether he can find a way around it.

New clause 17 seeks to ensure the possibility of every domestic household being connected to the main supply. That should be done at a cost that is within the means of the vast majority of people. While the tariff is common throughout the north of Scotland there are no guarantees for any other part of Scotland or for the rest of the United Kingdom. Will the Minister tell us what he understands by the word "tariff"? Does it mean the standing charge? Does it include charges for repair or a call-out charge? While one would not expect connection charges to be identical throughout an area there should be at least some common basis on which charges are calculated, such as happens at the moment for wayleave payments.

The quality of the supply and especially the quality of the repair service are vital in remote rural areas and cannot be measured in terms of pounds and pence. Those things cannot be left on trust. We need a person with responsibility for looking after the provision of the electricity supply in rural areas. That would ensure that when the supply was cut, not least because of inclement weather, there would be someone to put pressure on the electricity supply industry to ensure a proper and adequate response. No one expects overnight miracles, but without additional prompting the quality of the electricity supply to rural areas could seriously diminish. That is why I commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I want to make one point about the Grimethorpe fluidised bed plant because that plant stands at the edge of my constituency. As several hon. Members have said, the funding for the continuation of that plant's experiments has been under threat for several months.

[Mr. Eric Illsley]

Only yesterday, British Coal gave evidence to the Select Committee on Energy that £12 million would be necessary to continue the experiments. As British Coal has attracted private investment from a foreign company in Finland called Ahlström, we should like a commitment from the Minister about future funding. I understand that the decision could be delayed until after September because of the public expenditure allocations. If the money is delayed until then, the plant will have to close. Already jobs have been lost at the plant in the sense that some key personnel have gone abroad to work on similar schemes. Those jobs were in and around my constituency. I want the Minister to consider British Coal's request for a sign that the funding will be forthcoming even if that means waiting for the cash until September.

7.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): I want to answer three specific points before I set out the Government's general position. We agree entirely with the Opposition about the very important subject of energy conservation and its relationship to the Bill.

Having designated today as "environment day"—I am not sure whether that is official—the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said that we had cut the Energy Efficiency Office budget. He said that we would presumably be left with a massive generalised advertising campaign. The sneer with which he made that point—perhaps sneer is too strong a word; rather, his pained tone—showed that he thought that that would be a waste of money. I assure him that the cuts have taken place precisely because we cut the generalised advertising budget. We have replaced that large generalised budget, which we agree with the hon. Gentleman is not the best way to convey the message, with a much more cost-effective advisory programme targeted at specific major users. We think, and I suspect from the comments made by the hon. Member for Sedgefield that he would agree, that that is the best way to convey the message.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has just popped out of the Chamber so perhaps his colleagues will pass my comments on to him. He raised the matter of common tariffs. The privatised public electricity supply companies, the present area boards, will maintain the present structure for five years after flotation if that takes place in 1990. Ultimately we cannot prevent companies from charging tariffs which relate to costs. However, powers will be given to the director general under the terms of the Bill to enable him to ensure that tariffs relate to costs and are not excessive or in any way an abuse of a company's power. That new protection for consumers will exist in the Bill.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister said that there was no way in which the Government could enforce a particular stucture. However, I understand that they will enforce the common tariff structure for the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. If it is possible to do it there, why is it impossible to do it in the rest of the country? Is the Minister backtracking from the commitments given about the north of Scotland?

Mr. Spicer: I did not say that there was no way in which we could do it. I said that there is no way in which we would want to do it. Very special circumstances apply in the north of Scotland in terms of its geography and the way in which it is supplied with electricity—primarily through hydro. The Government felt that there were exceptional circumstances in the north of Scotland. Generally we would not wish to distort the market by insisting on common tariffs.

In answer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) about his constituent, I can tell him that my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office has taken that on board and has had a word with the hon. Gentleman. My hon. Friend will look into the matter. Under the terms of the Bill, if the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland was distressed about a particular charge for connection imposed on a constituent, he could involve the director general in determining whether that charge was correct. In that respect, the Bill is an improvement for the consumer.

It is easy to agree with almost every speech; turning lights on and generating heat involves processes which, with the exception of certain nuclear and renewable technologies, deplete the world stock of natural resources and, with no exceptions, have potential detrimental effects on the environment. The difficult part about this debate is to agree on what to do about it.

The thrust of the amendments is to rely on measures aimed at conserving energy. The most illiberal of those proposals is contained, as is sadly often the case these days, in the amendments of the old Liberal party. Those proposals relate to giving the regulator powers of direction and intervention to ensure, for example, that no new plant is developed unless a deputy director for conservation is satisfied that it meets certain conservationist criteria. The Democrats have gone over the top with new clause 17 which the Chair has allowed us to refer to. That new clause has been popping on and off the Amendment Paper over the past 24 hours like a jack-in-the-box.

New clause 17 proposes a rural supremo. Perhaps the Liberals can have a word with Mr. Gorbachev while he is in town. He is trying to withdraw his supremos from the countryside. The proposal for a deputy director for conservation and one for the countryside leads us to wonder why we do not have deputy directors for small houses, large houses, mothers or babies. We do not believe in that kind of interventionism. There is no way in which we can accept the new clause.

The Labour amendment proposes that a director should set annual targets for energy efficiency. Before we rush down that path of central direction and control, we should ask ourselves what is the precise purpose of conservation. Two distinct objectives have been mentioned so far and each of them may require distinct policies.

The first objective of conservation, as suggested by several hon. Members, is to make better use of scarce resources. The Government view on that is clearly different from that of the other political parties. Rather than use the instruments of central direction we shall provide the variety and the market conditions that will allow for advancing resource-efficient ways of producing power. In an excellent speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) stressed that particular point.

Mr. Blair: The Minister makes the extraordinary argument that he has some inhibition about central control, whereas he is setting up a panoply of regulation in the public interest that will interfere with the industry in many ways. Suppose that the interests of the market and of the environment conflict. Is the Minister prepared to interfere with the market to uphold the interests of the environment?

Mr. Spicer: I shall be dealing with such matters soon. I am trying to distinguish between the different thrusts of our argument, and perhaps I should not have given way. I shall be stressing that when it comes to environmental questions, the Government have a panoply of arguments. For the moment, I am talking about making better use of resources. Quite often, the Labour party engages in generalised rhetoric without explaining what it has in mind. We believe that it is better to focus on what we are proposing to achieve in the area of conservation. That is one of the reasons why we introduced the non-fossil fuel obligation, which the Opposition have so derided.

Nuclear power is certainly resource efficient, as are renewable sources of energy. It appears to have escaped the attention of the Opposition that last night we announced a special provision for renewables within the non-fossil fuel obligation. For the first time ever—and no one disputes this—the Bill gives the regulator the duty to promote efficiency. Above all, in the context of making better use of natural resources, the Bill radically restructures the industry, to allow energy-efficient producers to come on to the system. I have no doubt that that will happen, and the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) agreed that such producers will come on to the system as a consequence of our proposed restructuring.

Plans for combined cycle gas-fired stations, for new technology coal-fired plants, and even for smaller nuclear power stations are, as a direct result of the Bill, appearing in their legions as proposals with genuine prospects of being implemented. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East was also absolutely correct in that respect.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Minister is in danger of confusing himself. He said that he would move on to speak about environmental issues as distinct from those of conservation, and therefore does not accept that conservation is an environmental issue. Also, he proceeds to tell the House about the list of generating investment that is to come, as if it were an instrument of conservation. Conservation is about reducing demand, and therefore about reducing the requirment for additional investment in generating capacity.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman appears not to be listening as attentively as he normally does. He will see in *Hansard* tomorrow that I said that there are two functions of conservation. One deals with natural resources depletion, the other with the environment. We must be sure that we focus our policies in such a way that they will deal with both.

For the moment I am discussing resource depletion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East pointed out, even the successor companies to the CEGB are beginning to adapt to the spirit of the new age created by the Bill—judging by the recent pronouncements of Mr. Robert Malpas, chairman-designate of PowerGen.

The second objective of energy conservation is to meet the growing and legitimate concern for our environment, notably in respect of the effects of acid rain, SO_2 emissions, and the warming effect caused by CO_2. Our view, in contrast to that expressed by some hon. Members, is that we cannot rely solely on conservation measures to solve those problems. Demand for electricity is growing, and it is likely to continue increasing in all major industralised countries as consumers install new electrical processes and equipment. When the hon. Member for Gordon presents —as he did throughout the Committee stage—conservation as his major policy, he must acknowledge that major international organisations such as the International Energy Agency and the European Commission forecast continuing growth in electricity demand throughout the Community, even after taking account of prospective efficiency gains.

7.45 pm

A policy that wholly or largely relies on conservation —as does that of the hon. Member for Gordon from time to time, and, although I may be misinterpreting him, it is a policy which seems to be implicit at least in the Opposition's amendment—flies in the face of what is likely to occur in the next few years. Even allowing for conservation measures, demand is likely to grow. As we expect to be in government for the next 15 years, we cannot afford to theorise about those matters, and must be sure that the lights do not go out for old people and for the constituents we all represent. We must ensure that the growing demand for electricity is met while minimising the effects of that expansion on the environment. The key problems are how to achieve increased supply and not to rely exclusively on conservation to protect the environment. That is why the Government have introduced the tightest regulations ever to control SO_2 emissions, for example, which will have to be reduced by 60 per cent. on 1980 levels by the year 2003.

The other day, I heard it reported on radio that the hon. Member for Sedgefield proposed setting up reduced emission targets that would include one for CO_2. As we do not yet have the technology for controlling CO_2 emissions, I have to ask the hon. Gentleman whether that is an implicit reversal of Labour's anti-nuclear policy.

Mr. Blair: I was talking about conservation targets.

Mr. Spicer: If the hon. Gentleman meant conservation, I refer him to my earlier remarks, when I said that we must allow for the fact that demand will increase, even allowing for conservation. Targets related to CO_2 are a nonsense, and the hon. Gentleman probably knows it.

It is right to search for clean coal technologies, and right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House are right to stress the need for it. That brings me to the future of Grimethorpe. We have spent £17 million of public money on Grimethorpe, and we are now trying to ensure that industry adopts the available technology, particularly that relating to the topping cycle. We place great emphasis on individual involvement, mainly because in that way we can ensure that when the technology is fully developed it will be used—as opposed to being just another piece of fancy research that does nothing more than pander to green rhetoric. We have a good chance of successfully finding such a combination of industrial involvement in the technology. I certainly spend much of my time ensuring that that involvement takes place.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): If by the end of the public expenditure round in September or October of this year, industry cannot fund Grimethorpe, will the Government fund it to make sure that the topping cycle —we are a world leader in that technology—is continued in the autumn of this year?

Mr. Spicer: I cannot accept that. Even the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) accepted that the public expenditure round takes place in its own way. I cannot predict what submissions my Department might make to the Treasury or what the Treasury's response would be. I confirm that we are looking for industrial involvement in the project, for the good reason—not just the financial reason—that industrial involvement would mean that there would be a marketplace for the technology. It would not be sensible simply to pile in public money, in the absence of a genuine marketplace and take-up for the technology. Much public money has already been spent on Grimethorpe. If the hon. Gentleman thinks about it, he will understand that there has not been much take-up of the technologies.

We want to be sure that the development that takes place at Grimethorpe is taken up by industry. Industrial involvement is clearly the best way forward for Grimethorpe. We are certainly doing our best to ensure that there is such involvement.

There is a difference of approach between the Government and the Opposition parties on major matters of environmental controls and of conservation in particular.

Mr. Lofthouse: The Minister has already been informed by myself and other hon. Members that Mr. Malcolm Edwards made it clear yesterday that, by September, if there is no money from the Government, the Grimethorpe plant will be doomed. If that is the case, there would be little research into that technology in this country. Emergency measures must be taken by the Government to save Grimethorpe between now and September. Mr. Malcolm Edwards made it clear that he could not foresee any private sector money, apart from what has already been accepted, going into the scheme.

Mr. Spicer: I do not speak or answer for Mr. Malcolm Edwards. I answer for the Government. We are looking for industrial commitment to the technology, not because of funding but because we want the technology to be developed in such a way that it will be applied. That is a sensible way of going forward.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): As far as I can recollect, there have been field studies into industrial technology and other high-tech matters. Are the Government prepared to test the fluidised bed on a field basis to prove its viability?

Mr. Spicer: As the House already knows, there is considerable industrial involvement. We want to find more people to be involved, for the good reason that it will then be much more likely that the technology will be properly applied and used. We are not just spending money or keeping jobs in Grimethorpe. That is not the primary objective of even those hon. Members who represent constituents' interests. All hon. Members are concerned about developing a technology that will be applied to make the use of coal much more efficient, and particularly to affect carbon dioxide emission levels. One way in which we can ensure that the technology is applied is to get the participation of those who believe in the application of the technology. That will be good for its further use in the way that we have argued it should be used.

The Labour party and the Liberals would engage in rhetoric and bureaucracy, and that is demonstrated by their amendments. The Government are engaged in providing the market conditions and the associated regulations which will protect the environment and make the best use of scarce resources. For that reason, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the amendments should they be pressed to a vote.

Mr. Morgan: Hon. Members should be conscious of the importance that energy and the environment may have in politics. We are conscious of the visit by President Gorbachev, glasnost, and East-West relations. The Secretary of State is to visit the USSR next week. We must remember also that Mr. Gorbachev and glasnost would never have been successful but for the catastrophic Chernobyl accident. The attempt by the old Russian system to close the matter and say, "We must not tell the public about it," set the glasnost ball rolling in the Soviet Union. That is why we, in turn, place great emphasis on the conservation of energy and on conservation being written into the Bill in a much more powerful way than the Government have so far agreed to do. Why have the Government kept the Bill so weak and toned it down?

The Minister spoke at length, trying to break down energy conservation into its component parts and persuade people to make better industrial use of electricity in particularly and energy in general. He mentioned the problems that have arisen and the use of new technology in generation and utilising the waste heat that inevitably comes from generation. In his view, pollution has presented some sort of challenge. He said that, somehow, we are failing to take account of the impact of the coal industry on the pollution load in the atmosphere. The Government have suddenly deemed that they should grab the great issue of the greenhouse effect arising from carbon dioxide. That problem has arisen in the past two or three years. There is no point in jobbing backwards. Scientists are not examining it.

If the cause and effect that some scientists believe to exist in the connection between fossil fuel electricity generation and global warming is firmly proved over the next three or four years, obviously it will be a matter for policy adjustments when scientists have a clear message to tell us. In the meantime, it is not possible to find a serious scientist who is willing to commit himself or herself to the view that it is right now to change technologies from fossil fuel to nuclear fuel or other renewables. They will say that it makes sense to opt for conservation. The greenhouse effect argument that the Government have been trying to promote and use as a justification for the non-fossil fuel levy and for the protective right fence that they are putting around the nuclear industry but not around the coal industry was used by scientists to promote the need to write in conservation measures, as most American states have done and as the European Community is trying to do, but as this Government, given their big opportunity, are funking.

Let us work out why. The answer is simple. We have read about the great argument—we have heard it on serious television current affairs programmes on Sundays —between the Secretary of State for the Environment and

the Secretary of State for Energy. The Secretary of State for the Environment wants Britain to go all nuclear as quickly as possible. The Secretary of State for Energy had to put him right and insist, but in more elegant language, "Stay off my turf." He believes that we cannot afford to commit ourselves to a big programme of nuclear power and hope to float the industry.

The Secretary of State for the Environment says that he is an all-nuclear man, whereas the Secretary of State for Energy has a job to do—to sell the industry to the private sector. He is perfectly well aware from the advice that he is receiving from the merchant banks that one simply cannot do that and commit oneself to major changes in technology or to a building programme which he knows that the British power engineering industry cannot meet. He knows that if there were to be a big shift to nuclear power, there would be no chance of privatising the industry.

One cannot say that the industry is now due for a sea change in technology and for a major shift to some new and, in British terms, unproven method of generating power and yet hope to sell the industry. That would be an argument for keeping the industry in the public sector. There are many other arguments for that, but that is the argument that the merchant banks would use if the Secretary of State for the Environment were successful in persuading the Secretary of State for Energy that he had to shift to a major programme of nuclear power.

8 pm

The Department of Energy says that it wants to keep things simple and not tell anyone in the City who might be advising the buyers that they might need to think about huge write-offs of existing plant. The Department of Energy says that the industry should be kept as it is so that it can produce profits every year and that if there were to be tighter regulations, they should be introduced on a cumulative basis, a few per cent. a year, with which the industry could cope as if it were a conventional company.

The Secretary of State for the Environment goes for the big bang and the shifting of everything into nuclear power. We believe that we should adapt the existing technology and convert to smaller power stations, from which we could obtain far higher efficiency ratings. We are well aware that it is possible to improve the peak performance of power stations from the present 37 per cent. fuel efficiency to 75 per cent., with the use of the combined cycle, combined heat and power technology or both at the same time.

The other points that the Opposition have raised have been in relation to the Government's attitude to the Energy Efficiency Office and other allied activities. There has been an enormous deterioration in the availability of advice to industry and consumers because of the change from the community regulations to the employment training regulations in respect of schemes that can provide energy advice or energy saving devices in houses, such as draught strips and insulation. Grants have also been abolished.

I shall give an example from Cardiff. About six months ago, 230 people were engaged in energy advice under the community programme. In spite of the changes announced by the Department of Employment to try to save some of the schemes, only 40 people are now engaged in that scheme. The energy advice centre has been scrapped completely because it proved to be wholly impossible to make it compatible with the employment training regulations. That is a major loss to energy efficiency and conservation and it is a matter with which the Government have proved themselves inadequate to cope.

The Government's actions since the new year do not give us any confidence in the future of energy conservation. That is why we believe that it is essential to write into the Bill far stricter provisions than the Government have in mind. We know that the only people who are stopping the Government are the merchant bankers in the City who say that stricter provisions would over-complicate the issue and might stop the industry being sold off successfully. The merchant banks believe that if the Government want a successful sale, they should keep matters plain and simple and ensure that the industry can see the profits coming. The merchant banks believe that the Government should not tell people what there is to worry about in the energy future of the world.

We are glad that Mr. Malpas, the chief executive of PowerGen, has done his best to bring to the notice of the investing public, the general public and, most importantly, to the Government, just how important energy conservation is, whether the future of the electricity industry is in the public or private sector. Before any Conservative Back Benchers get the idea that conservation of the environment can be left safely to the private sector, I must point out that Opposition Members do not want to see the corner-cutting ethics and mentality of the Esso oil company, which caused the Prince William sound disaster of the Exxon Valdez in the past couple of weeks, running the electricity industry in this country.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 254.

Division No. 142] **[8.4 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cohen, Harry
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Coleman, Donald
Allen, Graham	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Anderson, Donald	Corbyn, Jeremy
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Cousins, Jim
Armstrong, Hilary	Cox, Tom
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Crowther, Stan
Ashton, Joe	Cryer, Bob
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Cummings, John
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Dalyell, Tam
Barron, Kevin	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Battle, John	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Beckett, Margaret	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Beith, A. J.	Dewar, Donald
Bell, Stuart	Dixon, Don
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Dobson, Frank
Bermingham, Gerald	Doran, Frank
Bidwell, Sydney	Duffy, A. E. P.
Blair, Tony	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Bradley, Keith	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Eadie, Alexander
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Eastham, Ken
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Buckley, George J.	Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Caborn, Richard	Fatchett, Derek
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Faulds, Andrew
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Fearn, Ronald
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Fisher, Mark
Clay, Bob	Flannery, Martin
Clelland, David	Flynn, Paul
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Foot, Rt Hon Michael

Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard

Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 11

Access to Information

'(1) The Director General shall require that consumer committees, customers and members of the public have full access to any information regarding their health and safety resulting from any activities connected with the supply, generation or transmission of electricity.

(2) Nothing in this Act concerning the protection of information or persons shall prevent disclosure of any information required under (1) above.'.—*[Mr. Malcolm Bruce.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28.

8.15 pm

Mr. Bruce: The purpose of the new clause is to ensure that information on safety is made available to consumer committees and to the public. That is not specifically allowed for in the Bill as it stands. The record of the electricity supply industry in the recent past suggests that such a measure is necessary. The Minister and hon. Members who served on the Committee with me know that I feel strongly about the conduct of the industry especially in relation to nuclear power. I believe that having the requirement that such information be made available to consumer committees and to the public would be beneficial to the image and to the esteem in which the industry is held by the public. The lack of such a provision has been extremely damaging in that respect.

The problem with the Bill as drafted is that the specific restriction on the publishing of information is likely to work against the public interest and lead to the information being withheld or suppressed until long after it has any relevance or could in any way be helpful.

It might be helpful to the House if I quote three or four examples of the sort of information that I feel should be available. One problem that has been actively debated in recent years, especially since the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents, is exactly what emergency procedures there should be for a nuclear accident at a British nuclear installation. At the moment there is a lack of public awareness about exactly what would happen in the event of a significant nuclear accident. Do people actually know what to do? Do the operators of nuclear power stations know that action they should take? At what point should they alert people round about? When should they shut down and evacuate the area? What should people in the area be told to do in the event of a significant leak of radiation that would require action?

There is no doubt that if there were such a leak without people being properly informed, the instinct would be to run, to panic and to evacuate the area; yet there is evidence to suggest that that is the wrong thing to do, depending on how serious the accident is. When the plume of radiation is being discharged, that is not the time to be out in the open and, although there is a danger wherever one is, it may be safer to stay indoors than to go out into the open. People need to know when they should stay and when they should move.

There are practical considerations too. Nuclear power stations, in particular, tend to be in rather remote areas where the roads are not designed to allow a lot of people to move quickly at one time; the congestion could aggravate the seriousness of the incident. There is no agreed procedure as to whether or not and when, if and how, stable iodine tablets should be issued; people do not even know where they could get them or whether to take them.

This is in sharp contrast with the situation in the United States perhaps because, regrettably, that country has experienced a major accident. In the United States the telephone books in the area of a nuclear installation contain clear descriptions of what people should do in the event of a nuclear accident. We should, in any case, have that sort of agreement here. It should be published and available now, but it should certainly be done once the industry moves into the private sector, and the Bill should require it to be done.

The Prime Minister and other Ministers have suggested in replies to hon. Members that the whole thing is under control, that they have discussed this with all the relevant authorities and that the latter know what to do. That does not appear to be the view of the County Emergency Planning Officers Society whose members remain concerned about a number of shortfalls in the agreement. A working party has produced a number of reports yet still has outstanding concerns as to what can and should be done. So nobody is in a position either to say that the relevant authorities have a nationally agreed scheme and a standard of what should happen. Nor does anyone know how to publicise this or ensure that the public know what to do and what not to do in the event of a major disaster.

I make no apology for the fact that my examples are drawn mostly from nuclear accidents, but what I am saying applies to other kinds of generating station. The same procedures should apply. There should be a clear understanding of exactly what happens and how the public

[Mr. Bruce]

will be informed. It is quite proper that the consumer committees set up under the Bill should be an integral part of the process of ensuring dissemination of accurate information.

A problem has emerged, for example, in relation to overhead power lines. I am not competent to say whether the anxieties that have been expressed about safety risks from living close to overhead power lines are valid, but I think that consumer committees should be empowered to get the relevant information, publicise it and make recommendations about appropriate action. I have had a representation from a doctor in my constituency who says that he has had complaints from patients living in the area of overhead power lines. Although he has no statistical proof, he feels that there is some correlation, although it may be more psychological than real. That is the kind of information that needs to be examined and circulated.

Workers in the industry have suffered from overdoses of radiation. They are entitled to know exactly what the situation is. In 1986 British Nuclear Fuels said that 631 of its employees had received a dose of radiation in excess of the approved safety level. Although figures are not available for the Atomic Energy Authority and the Central Electricity Generating Board, there seems to be some suggestion that some of their employees have been affected. This is aggravated by the National Radiation Protection Board's view that the recommended safety limit be reduced to one third. If that were applied, the numbers exposed to unsafe radiation levels in the industry would rise substantially. That kind of information ought to be available and properly circulated, and people working in the industry should have the right of access to it.

Our most recent experience is the Chernobyl disaster. What happened then is indicative of our country's lack of preparedness in the event of a major accident, not just in the United Kingdom but across the Channel in France or Belgium. Those countries are much closer to us than Kiev, so the intensity of radiation to which we could be exposed and the speed at which it arrived would require much more urgent and coherent reaction than the Chernobyl cloud required. Yet the reaction to Chernobyl was confused and contradictory and did anything but inspire public confidence in our procedures.

Perhaps I could refer the House to a letter in *The Independent* of 10 August 1988 from a senior registrar in community medicine and a lecturer in community medicine, writing from London NW3. They conducted their own survey of district medical officers to ask how they viewed the response at the time of Chernobyl. The writers had a response rate of 89 per cent., which in itself indicated a high level of concern. Fifty-two per cent. of those responding said that they had tried to get information about local radiation levels but had had little success. The general view was that what information was available was in a form that was unusable, unintelligible and contradictory. It was said that the blind were leading the blind and that the advice which arrived was too little and too late. Two years after the incident, the letter writers' view was that nothing had fundamentally changed.

We need to know how we would respond if—I hope it does not happen—we had an accident close to our shores or within the United Kingdom where it would appear that we have no mechanism for ensuring that safety information is properly conveyed to the public, information to which they can have access as of right.

Lack of information leads to a proliferation of rumour and suspicion, which, in return, may lead to an exaggeration of the problem. If, for example, there is a minor radiation leak in a nuclear power station, there is no mechanism for ensuring that the information is made available to the relevant people; yet in the locality people will hear about it and will assume that it is much worse than it is because, they will argue, why should people cover up if it is only a minor incident? I am sure that the Minister will accept that it would be much better to state clearly the nature of the incident; then the consumer committees, because they would gain a degree of understanding, could put the matter in its proper perspective.

Having been a very strong critic of the conduct of the nuclear industry, I think that there has been an improvement—although it is not perfect by any means—in recent years. The difficulty is that the industry has spent so many years misleading the public and suppressing information that there is a fundamental inability to take anything that the industry says at face value. People are extremely suspicious.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of suppression of information that the public had a right to know is that of the Windscale fire. It happened a long time ago and we are fortunate that, although it was a serious incident—the most serious in the United Kingdom—we have not had an incident on that scale since. I believe that what happened there is indicative of how serious the suppression problem is. I shall not go into the political domain about the fact that the Prime Minister of the day basically suppressed the information because it was thought to be unwise, undesirable and politically embarrassing to reveal it. My concern is that the National Radiological Protection Board estimated that the Windscale fire led to 260 cases of thyroid cancers, 13 of them fatal.

Another estimate has suggested that there could have been up to 1,000 fatal cancers linked to that fire. That is serious information. What happened was that there was a fire and a discharge of radiation, and information on the matter was suppressed. People in the area were not told and therefore were not able to take any precautions. They were exposed to excessive levels of radiation and as a result 1,000 people died of cancer during the years that followed. Clearly, if they had had the right of access to that information, some of those deaths would have been avoided because precautions could have been taken at the time.

8.30 pm

The right to know is a fundamental right, as is the right to take relevant action to protect one's own life. The new clause would ensure that the consumer committees and the public generally had a right to obtain information relating directly to their health requirements. I believe, therefore, that the new clause would be welcomed.

The Minister should accept the new clause because at the end of the day it will be beneficial to the industry. The industry's record of suppressing information and releasing bits and pieces of information late and in a form that does not increase knowledge, adds to public concern and anxiety and has probably damaged the industry's public image almost irreparably. There is no doubt that, if that action were taken, a start could be made towards ensuring

that there was greater confidence between the public and the consumer committees and the industry. The public would have the right to information about what was happening in the electricity supply industry that would have implications for their safety and that of those working in the industry.

I hope that the House will accept the new clause.

Mr. Hardy: I shall not take as long as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), but I urge the Minister to look favourably on the new clause. I accept that it may have one defect that is perhaps regrettable, which is that it does not refer directly to those who are employed in the industry. However, one assumes that the Democrats were including those people in the reference to members of the public. I believe that the intention of the new clause is one that we should support and, if it comes to a vote, I shall be in the Lobby with the hon. Member for Gordon.

The Minister should recognise that education goes hand in hand with safety. We see far too much of the furtive commitment to secrecy from the present Administration. I shall cite an example. Probably the only open Department of State nowadays is the Department of Transport. It has recognised that it is necessary to put warning notices up on our highways. I accept that under this Administration warning notices proliferate much more than they have ever before. However, if the Department of Transport feels that it is necessary to warn people of approaching road hazards, surely the Department of Energy should insist that a similar approach is adopted for generation. I am not talking only of nuclear generation. I accept, too, that the hon. Member for Gordon was not restricting his remarks to that sector.

The Government must recognise that people demand more information. About two days after the Chernobyl incident I recall a member of the present Cabinet saying to me, "Is it not disgraceful that the Russians are not saying anything about this event that is reported to have happened in the Soviet Union?" I said, "I don't know anything about it, but, if they don't say anything about it, it would, indeed, be disgraceful and disreputable." After the first few days the Russians were quite severely criticised for an excessive reticence, which may have been due to an excessive bureaucracy. However, the fact remains that after that period of discretion, reticence, or whatever one likes to call it, they were a great deal more open and informative in telling the world about the details of that dreadful accident that some Western countries have been in regard to incidents or accidents in their plants, which, fortunately, have not been on the same scale as Chernobyl. However, that perhaps is a matter of fortune rather than of skilled administration.

We have been too furtive. In the past decade we have seen example after example of the use of public resources for unnecessary secrecy. I learned the other day that there are techniques and staff in the public service in various Government Departments devoted to detecting photocopies of pieces of paper. That causes one to wonder sometimes about the Minister's hesitation in incurring expenditure on matters which are perhaps far more in the public good.

I believe that the new clause is a good one. I hope that the Minister will respond positively to it, because with new clause 11 have been selected Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28. The Minister will recall that, in Committee, he appeared to be slightly persuaded when I moved amendments on safety. I hope that in the weeks since those debates, he has recognised that he appeared to be moving towards a sympathy with safety. If he has, perhaps when the House approves Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28, he will allow new clause 11 to go through as well.

Mr. Morgan: A key factor in Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28—I quote amendment No. 28 as an example —is

"protecting the public from dangers arising from the generation, transmission or supply of electricity".

We understand that that is to cover also the dangers that arise from the disposal of the waste products on the nuclear side of the industry and those arising from generation.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend is right to make that assumption. Perhaps the Minister will make that point clear when he replies.

I can see nothing wrong with the new clause except, as I have said, that it would have been useful if it had included specific reference to the people employed in the industry rather than simply assuming that they would be covered by the reference to members of the public.

I am not too worried about the reference to those who will serve on the committees, largely because I am suspicious of the sort of people who nowadays are appointed to quangos. They are more likely to embarrass or injure themselves than us. I am, however, concerned about the public good.

I had no intention of referring to those who live underneath transmission lines but, when I saw a scare story reported in a newspaper some time ago, I recall that I asked our local medical officer of health if it would be possible to carry out a survey. The statistical base would need to be a great deal larger than would have been possible in my local locality and therefore, as far as I know, no study has been undertaken.

Now that the matter has been mentioned in the House, the Minister had better be prepared to respond fully. If he cannot do so tonight, I have no doubt that the matter will be raised in another place. There is a possibility that more scare stories may develop and, if reassurance is justified, it would be as well for that reassurance to be offered. If it is not justified, perhaps a little more information should be given.

I recall the considerable strain and anger that existed, and may still exist, in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Saarland as a result of the anxieties of the people living quite close the French border, about French secrecy. We do not have any national or territorial boundaries with other countries, so we must contain our anxieties and strain within our island. I believe that the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Gordon are justified and those who live in the proximity of a power station —it need not be nuclear—are anxious.

There is no reason why the Government should be furtive or secretive or seek to deny information. Information should be available if only because of the 1957 episode. Never again should people be denied information that is of direct relevance to their health and their other interests. For that reason I am happy to support the new clause. I only wish that it covered the employees of the nuclear industry.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I had not intended to contribute to the debate, but the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made a fair point when he moved the new clause.

We have already been told that the Government are unlikely to respond to any attempts to amend the Bill, but the hon. Member for Gordon raised the important issue of safety. We must all be safety-conscious, as that is the only way in which to deal with problems. Any laxity in safety means that we are put in peril. The Government must reflect on the experience of previous legislation. It is not good enough for something permissive to be written into legislation. If the argument advanced is right and proper, any obligations should be mandatory. In that way there is no argument. I hope that the Minister will not fall back on the excuse of previous Governments and decide that what is written into the Bill should be permissive.

The only weakness in the new clause—this is not meant as a criticism—is that the employees of the industry are not included. They are not just employees, but members of the public. Their knowledge would help to achieve the aims set out in the new clause.

The new clause is important because of the defensive history of the thermal nuclear power industry. It has spent a lot of time and effort to promote the idea that everything is all right and that there is no danger. It has claimed that, technologically, everything is perfect. The possibilities of an accident have been worked out statistically, but, as the hon. Member for Gordon has said, Three Mile Island and Chernobyl have put paid to those efforts. Human weakness can always occur.

We are still suffering the effects of Chernobyl in Scotland. During last night's debate a Conservative Member made an absurd intervention during my speech and spoke about radiation from coal. I have never heard of any coal mine being responsible for radiation for year after year. I was in Norway at the time of the Chernobyl incident and when I was told that its reindeer herd had had to be slaughtered I was extremely sad.

The hon. Member for Gordon is right to say that the nuclear power industry has always been extremely defensive. I know of people who earn their livelihoods from statistics. If a construction is undertaken, people can calculate with amazing accuracy how many people are likely to be killed at the building site if the construction continues for a couple of years. As a consequence of our North sea oil explorations, people are now able to calculate, statistically, how many people are likely to be killed as a result of that exploration. As legislators we do not appreciate that when we approve some legislation it means that, inevitably, people will be killed as a consequence.

I am all in favour of technology and I am not against nuclear power in the sense that it represents new technology. It is against my background to be against new technology because I have always said, "If new technology can do the job, why should men's backs be broken?" The silliest thing that I ever heard in my life was the claim that hard work never killed anyone. I live in a small mining village and in the cemetery I could point out those individuals who died as a consequence of hard work. When people say that hard work never killed anyone, it generally means that they have never done any hard work in their lives.

8.45 pm

Forty years ago I was employed in the rail industry for a short time. About a month ago I had the great privilege of driving a diesel train—I had only driven steam trains. The first thing I asked was where the dead man's brake was, but, although we have such brakes, accidents still happen. Human error still occurs. Such error can arise in the nuclear power industry and it is not valid to argue that everything is perfect and every effort has been made to make things safe—experience tells us otherwise. Many people in many industries spend a great deal of time trying to make those industries as technologically safe as possible, but the human factor must always be taken into account.

I am anything but impressed by thermal nuclear power, as I believe that it carries built-in hazards. However, the new clause could help the nuclear power industry. We should reveal all and we should tell people what has happened. We should make them even more safety-conscious and, above all, those who work in the industry should be taken into the confidence of those who run it. Those employees will not brook any people who are anti their industry. They want to make it work and they believe in it.

I hope that the Minister will not use the old argument about making such things permissive. If we really agree with the hon. Member for Gordon, the legislation should be mandatory and not permissive.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) about permissiveness as opposed to something that is mandatory. I was reminded of what was said today by the Leader of the House. He used a time-honoured phrase about the Prime Minister making herself available to Gorbachev. Is that what my hon. Friend means by permissiveness? I have a picture in my mind, but I had better not take that matter any further.

I am absolutely certain that the provisions of the Bill must be mandatory if it is to mean anything in terms of giving power and rights to consumers. Our experience of permissive local government legislation in particular has made us aware of the pitfalls. My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend mentioned the effects of Chernobyl and the way in which they are still being felt in Scotland, let alone in Wales and other parts of Great Britain. I remember that incident clearly. Two or three days after it we heard that the radioactive cloud was making its way up the Thames estuary—there was a report on the "Today" programme about it. That morning there was a large demonstration outside the Department of Energy. The leading wet, now the so-called Secretary of State for Wales, was in charge of energy at that time. The Friends of the Earth were drawing attention to the fact that he had said that nuclear power was the safest form of energy known to man. People were scared. It is the only time that I can recall men and women, young and old, coming towards us, snatching the leaflets out of our hands so that they would know what effects Chernobyl might have.

Once that radioactive cloud went up into the sky it belonged not to Russia or to America but to mother nature, and it went the way that the wind blew. People were scared stiff about the consequences. I remember one woman standing about five yards away, who had her hand

out waiting to grab a leaflet. I said to her, "It is all right; the cloud is moving away; it is behind you. If you keep moving the other way you can race it if you get as far as Reading." Off she went, scared stiff. That is what nuclear power means to people when there is a disaster like Chernobyl.

Considering the matter from that point of view, I wonder what powers the director general will have. If there were explosions, could he do anything to protect consumers and their rights? Let us suppose that the director general had to deal with something less important. Let us suppose that he was confronted by four Tory Members of Parliament who told him that they had heard on the grapevine that the new organisation running nuclear power—the new "opoly", or whatever it is called —had decided to dump low-level nuclear waste in their constituencies. Let us suppose that those four Members included a Cabinet Minister, perhaps the Leader of the House, and a junior Minister at the Home Office because they were to have low-level nuclear waste dumped in their areas.

Accountability is to be taken from the public sector and handed over to the private sector with a bit of a director general in charge who is to protect the rights of consumers. What would happen if the Leader of the House was complaining about the dumping of low-level waste in his constituency because he had had 5,000 letters from people taking a NIMBY attitude, people whom we might loosely call clones of the Secretary of State for the Environment. Under market force operations, what powers would the director general have in those circumstances? As we all know, similar proposals were made some time ago. Because we were coming up to a general election, and because there was an umbilical cord between the Secretary of State and the Leader of the House and other Tory Members, they managed to get rid of those dumping grounds.

The same process will be repeated over and over again, especially as power stations are to be decommissioned. The companies will have to find somewhere to put the muck. The director general will be a Tory; there is no doubt about that. The Prime Minister will ask, is he or she one of us? Whatever the Secretary of State says, the director general will go along with it because he will be in the Prime Minister's pocket. So the director general—good Tory that he will be—will say, "I will tell you what we will do; we will make sure that the waste is dumped in Labour areas." Perhaps it will be dumped in Liberal areas, or it could go into the areas represented by the new-fangled party, the party that dare not speak its name, the one that changes its name every five months.

So the director general will say that the waste may be dumped in old mines, perhaps in Derbyshire, Yorkshire or south Wales. He will suggest that the rubbish should be put in those areas. That is what I can see happening. That is why it is essential that there are mandatory powers.

Mr. Hardy: Has not my hon. Friend noticied over the last two or three years that there has been remarkable uniformity and solidarity on the Government Benches? Does not he suspect that the Government Chief Whip has been using that as a threat to maintain discipline in Government ranks?

Mr. Skinner: The Government have used some new-fangled ideas and some old-fangled bullying since the Prime Minister came to power. They have shop stewards on the door when we are voting. They may call them Whips, but they are really shop stewards. They hustle the Government Back Benchers in. Every so often they say, "If you behave yourself, we will give you a bisque." That is French for being absent without leave. It is a night off to do research or whatever they have to do in the course of those odd hours.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Clearly the hon. Gentleman is not a croquet player; otherwise, he would know that a bisque is a free go for an inferior player.

Mr. Skinner: Well, I never. Here am I, in this mirror image of the Eton debating society, and I have got the bisque wrong. Oh, what a disaster. Do I feel so small, so belittled that I do not know the croquet term "bisque"? I will tell hon. Members what I do know. I know that the Tories will trot through the Lobby behind him when the Minister decides to force a vote on the issue. They will be hustled in by the Tory shop stewards on the door. They will go through the hoop, or the French equivalent of the hoop—I have no doubt that there is a croquet term for that as well.

One of the most alarming things about all this is that the consumer has seen what can happen when parts of the public sector are privatised or when there is loose control by the Tory Government of the public sector. It means that less money is spent on safety and security. We have seen it at the airports; we have seen what it has meant for human life. There will be less public control. The entrepreneurs and those who operate the market forces will be in charge of nuclear power. The state will not be able to exert its influence. Even though we are talking about a small point we need a mandatory provision that gives proper rights to consumers.

Those are my few observations on the matter. I believe that the Bill will be looked upon in future as a disaster. People will reflect upon it and say. "What were the Government playing at? Why was a public utility responsible for nuclear power left to the whims of those who are in it to make money hand over fist and to line the pockets of the friends of the Tory party?" It would be a small price to pay if the Government were to accept the amendments and make sure that the Bill includes a mandatory provision.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Like other hon. Members, the Government attach great importance to maintaining the industry's high safety standards. That is why we undertook in Committee to examine safety questions carefully and to come forward, if necessary, with further safeguards. That is what lies behind Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28 to which only brief reference has been made by Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). Opposition Members were rather churlish. We spent much time in Committee considering safety matters. As a result of those deliberations the Government have proposed amendments. They are the product of good work in Committee. I would have thought that Opposition Members would at least have made a passing reference to them.

I shall first refer to the two questions raised by the hon. Members for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). The hon. Member for Bolsworthy, or

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

rather for Bolsover—Bolsworthy may be the right expression since we have been talking about croquet—mentioned mother nature and rightly said that nuclear incidents are international. The Government have signed an international convention on the notification of nuclear incidents under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency and will ask Parliament to ratify that in the Atomic Energy Bill that the Leader of the House announced that we would debate next Thursday. On the basis of what Opposition Members have said tonight, I hope that they will vote in favour of the Atomic Energy Bill, of which a major part is the ratification of that convention. I hope that that partly explains what the Government have done, in answer to the important point raised by the hon. Member for Bolsover.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) looks worried. Perhaps he has not yet geared up to dealing with the Bill. Perhaps I have just given him his first warning of it.

9 pm

Mr. Barron: I am geared up. What surprises me about the Atomic Energy Bill is that the Minister assumes that we shall not vote against it.

Mr. Spicer: I said that I assumed on the basis of the arguments and very good points which have been made by Opposition Members tonight, that because the Bill will meet those reasonable worries, the hon. Member for Rother Valley would vote in favour of it.

In answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, the responsibility for the safety of nuclear waste and nuclear power stations generally is a matter for the operators of the stations, acting under the regulations, guidelines and monitoring of the nuclear installations inspectorate and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. That is how safety regulations apply in this country.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister mentioned that I had referred to Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28. He will also recall that I expressed slight criticism of new clause 11 because it did not refer to employees of the industry. The same point could be made about Government amendments Nos. 2 and 28 because they refer to the public. The Minister will recall that when I took part in this debate in Committee, I made reference to employees in the industry. Will he assure the House that the new clauses will refer to employees of the industry as well as to members of the general public?

Mr. Spicer: I am checking the precise answer to that question but I am pretty certain that I can give that assurance to the hon. Gentleman. I want to be absolutely clear and I am just awaiting confirmation of that.

In our view, new clause 11 is not the sensible way to approach this extremely important—we are all agreed on this—issue of safety. By implication, it gives the primary responsibility for the safety of the general public to the director. In the Bill, it is implicit that the responsibility for safety is covered by the electricity supply regulations, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and other Acts and secondary legislation which deal with specific aspects of safety. Those include the Factories Act 1961 and the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1985. Within the broad panoply of these health and safety regulations it is right that the director and the Secretary of State should take safety into account as a major factor when the economic regime and regulation is set. That is the key issue and that is why amendment No. 2 specifically requires that the duties and functions of both the Secretary of State and the director should be exercised in the manner best calculated to protect the public from dangers arising from the generation, transmission and supply of electricity. The need to comply with that duty will clearly be a factor in the director's use of information powers under clause 44. That partly answers the question of the hon. Member for Wentworth.

Mr. Eadie: I talked about permissive and mandatory legislation. Am I to assume that the Minister is telling us that the director of information will have discretionary powers. The thrust of our argument is that the public, and employees of the industry, are entitled to know where they stand. Is not the Minister contradicting that if he says that the director is to have certain discretionary powers?

Mr. Spicer: All I have said is that the health and safety regime is laid down by a mass of parliamentary legislation and that we must ensure that our amendments achieve what they are intended to achieve; that nothing that the director—who is concerned primarily with economic and not safety regulations—does when applying his economic regulation duties, conflicts with the safety and health regime which exists by statute. In the Bill we must make it absolutely clear that, when assessing the duties of the director, they do not conflict with existing legislation which is outside the Bill.

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. Spicer: Before I give way I must not forget to tell the hon. Member for Wentworth that clause 3 (3) and the health and safety at work regulations cover employees.

Mr. Morgan: I wonder whether the Minister has seriously considered the practicalities of what he is saying—that the director will be mostly concerned with the economic and not safety regulations, and that the two interests should not conflict. What about when they do? Last night the Secretary of State mentioned the possibility of renegotiating the BNFL contract on reprocessing with National Power. One way to do that would be so that BNFL did not reprocess some of the fuel from the AGRs but, instead, left it for storage. National Power would say that it would save money by doing that. Would the director have the right to say that he did not consider that safe?

Mr. Spicer: The Government amendments emphasise that the director will have to bear in mind public safety at all times when making his decisions. These amendments will have additional effects. When clause 3 was first discussed in Committee, it was suggested that the duties of the director and the Secretary of State were deficient because they did not refer specifically to safety. However, that concern is met by amendment No. 2 which underlines the duties of the Secretary of State and the director to consider safety at all times.

At present, the general framework for safety in the electricity industry is set by the electricity supply regulations. The Government were responsible for instituting the first full-scale revision of those regulations

for 50 years, culminating in the issue of new regulations last year. Those regulations established a general framework of standards. The key point in answer to the hon. Member for Gordon is that only those with expert knowledge of a particular site or installation and with responsibility for its operation can determine the precise safety measures required under the general regulation. That is established practice in Britain for dealing with safety. That is why the first responsibility must and does rest with the industry.

Those responsibilities are laid down in an array of primary and secondary legislation and that is further supported by the common law on matters such as the duty of care under the law of negligence. None of that will change with the passage of the Bill. That is the answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie). Licence holders and those operating under exemptions will have to act in accordance with the same regime that has resulted in the current high standards of safety in the industry.

The Bill provides for the continuation of the existing electricity supply regulations and clause 27 enables the regulations to be added to or revised as necessary.

In Committee there seemed to be some doubt about the precise purpose of clause 27. Amendment No. 28 is designed to put its purpose beyond doubt. It makes it explicit that regulations made under the clause can include those concerned directly with safety aspects of the industry's operations and, in particular, the protection of the public.

I hope that, having explained the philosophy of not only the electricity industry but other industries with which I have been concerned—for example, the aviation industry, where the primary duty is placed upon the operator within the standards laid down—we have made it clear that nothing done under the Bill, in particular under the terms laid down for the duties of the regulator, conflict with the standards, regulations and legislation laid down to protect safety, which all agree is paramount. I hope that, on the basis of that explanation, the hon. Member for Gordon will feel able to withdraw his new clause.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Minister has dealt with the Government amendments rather than with my new clause. I accept that amendments Nos. 2 and 28 improve the Bill and that they are a response to our debates in Committee. But they do not relate to the points that I and other hon. Members have raised tonight. The Minister has essentially debated the quality of safety inspection and enforcement under the licences proposed by the Bill, whereas we are talking about the public's right to have information about safety and the directors' responsibility to ensure access to that information when it is needed.

I intended my new clause to include employees within the industry because they have a particular right to information. The new clause can include them, but it might have been better if it had specifically done so.

The hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) referred to reindeer in Scandinavia suffering from the fallout from Chernobyl. That is the sort of information that is important. Reindeer's metabolism enables them to operate efficiently in the Arctic tundra, but it also makes them especially vulnerable to radiation. They convert food quickly so that the build-up of radiation in their natural food, the tundra moss, affects them much more intensely than other animals. That is the kind of information to which the public are entitled and it was the kind of information that was not available in any clear or consistent form at the time of the Chernobyl disaster.

Many hon. Members will recall the confusing information that came from the Government at that time. The Scottish Office said that milk was not safe to drink, then that it was safe and then that it was not safe. That did not inspire public confidence and did not provide the important and relevant information.

However, the essential point is that the Minister is saying that the director should not impinge on safety; that the new regime will ensure that there is a specific responsibility to have due regard to safety. We say that the public and those working in the industry should have the director's support to get access to information that they need to enable them to make decisions. The Minister is effectively arguing that the public have to trust the experts who are entrusted with safety and have no right to know what the experts are talking about. In other words, they have no right to explanations in the kind of language that people can understand which show exactly what is expected of them, the action open to them and to whom they can turn to obtain the relevant explanation of expert information.

9.15 pm

Helpful as they are, the Government's amendments are not relevant to my new clause, without which the Bill will be substantially weakened because consumer committees and the public do not have the right of access to essential information. All the anxieties and reservations that many of us have had about the industry during the past 20 years are passing unanswered into the private sector. If we could not get the information that we needed when the industry was in the public sector, accountable through Ministers to the House, what chance have we of getting it through a private commercial organisation from which the director has no power to demand such information on behalf of the consumer committees or the public? The answer is that we have no chance of doing so. I intend to force my new clause to a Division and I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will support it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 77, Noes 197.

Division No. 143] **[9.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Fearn, Ronald
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Foster, Derek
Barron, Kevin	Foulkes, George
Beith, A. J.	Galbraith, Sam
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Golding, Mrs Llin
Blair, Tony	Hardy, Peter
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Haynes, Frank
Buckley, George J.	Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Home Robertson, John
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Hood, Jimmy
Cohen, Harry	Howells, Geraint
Cox, Tom	Hoyle, Doug
Cryer, Bob	Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Dalyell, Tam	Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Dewar, Donald	Ilsley, Eric
Dixon, Don	Johnston, Sir Russell
Doran, Frank	Kennedy, Charles
Dunnachie, Jimmy	Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Eadie, Alexander	McAllion, John
Eastham, Ken	McAvoy, Thomas
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*	Macdonald, Calum A.

McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wall, Pat
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Richard Livsey.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 2

CONSUMERS' COMMITTEES

Mr. Barron: I beg to move amendment No. 121, in page 2, line 23, after "shall", insert

"seek to ensure that the committee is representative of local consumer interests and geographical areas and shall".

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 114, in page 2, line 25, at end insert

"The Scottish Committees shall include a representative of each island and regional authority.".

Mr. Barron: We had quite a lengthy debate in Committee on this matter, and this is a further attempt to ensure that the members of the consumer committees are really representative of the interests of local consumers. During the debate in Committee, the Minister showed a lack of understanding of exactly what concerns people who represent the interests of consumers. I quoted to him a brief that had been given, as I understand it, to all hon. Members by the Consumers Association, a respected body which has worked for many years promoting the interests and rights of consumers. It commented directly on the wording and on the likely operation of the clause:

"We do not agree with the 'desirability of appointing a person who has experience of, and has shown capacity in, matters relevant to the provision of electrical services'"—

that is the wording that we, too, should like to change with this amendment—

"Part 1 Clause 2 Subsection 4. This is a recipe for ensuring that the committees are 'captured' by the industries they are meant to be supervising."

Opposition Members, having been through the Bill in Committee, have little confidence that the vested interests of the electricity supply industry will be removed by clause 2 if it is left unamended.

Indeed, in Committee the Minister said:

"we see the committees not like such bodies in the past, which have stood on the touchline of the regulatory process, but as an integrated part of that process with well-defined roles." —[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 12 January 1989; c. 122.]

9.30 pm

We believe that, in a general sense, the committees may be far too integrated if their members do not directly represent consumer interests. Consumer interests are not necessarily the interests of the electricity supply industry. We are anxious, therefore, that the committees should not be dominated by the industry's needs or the regulator's demands. Regulations and consumer advocacy are not the same and we must ensure that the committees are vigorously independent. We tried throughout to get financial independence for these committees so that they would have their own offices in the different areas. On each occasion we failed and were not backed by the Minister. So we return to say to him that we are unhappy with the make-up of the consumer committees. What he asks for in the clause is not necessarily in the interest of the consumer.

We hope that the Minister has taken the opportunity in the few short weeks since we left clause 2 in Committee to look in greater detail at the issue. I look forward to hearing what he has to say. This looks a bit wider than the earlier debate and we hope that the Bill will be amended so that it, too, will be a bit wider than what we have in front of us.

Mr. Wallace: Amendment No. 114 is in my name and the names of my hon. Friends. In many respects, albeit in a Scottish context, it seeks to do much the same as the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

The composition of the proposed committees requires the director to have regard to people who have experience of the provision of electricity supply services. This seems to be a very odd requirement considering that the committees, one assumes, are to represent the interests of consumers. While some passing knowledge is obviously required, many consumers do not have the first idea how their electricity supply gets to them but have far more than a passing interest in having a regular, secure supply. These are the people whose interests the consumers' committees should be protecting.

If one looks at the responsibility and functions of consumers' committees, one finds, in clause 47, that they have, among other responsibilities, a duty to keep under review matters affecting the interests of consumers of electricity supplied to premises in the committee's areas. My constituency is in the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board area. It is a vast area and my constituency is itself quite vast, with particular problems that apply to islands areas. For a start, Shetland is not connected to the national grid. Its main electricity supply comes from a diesel-generated power station in Lerwick. It has in places such as Fair Isle a unique form of supply which is dependent on wind power—and all credit to the hydro-electric board that it has set this up. But there are very particular problems relating to an area with particular needs.

Our reasonable request is that people from each geographical area—we have defined that in terms of local authority areas, because that is a neat way of doing it—should be on the consumers' committees. It is only people from specific areas who have first-hand experience of circumstances and conditions in different parts of the country and who know what the needs of these areas are.

These are very modest proposals and if the Government accepted the amendments it would show that they are genuinely interested in the rights and interests of the consumers. I do not see that there is anything fundamental at stake with regard to the overall strategy of the Bill. By conceding the amendments they would prove that they have the interests of consumers at heart and I hope that the Minister will give us a positive response.

Mr. Hardy: I shall be brief. I want to say a word or two in criticism of the "one of us" syndrome which is far too prevalent today in British political life. I am not at all happy about many of the appointments made by the Government. I recall not very long ago pursuing a regional aid case in my constituency. It was referred to the Department of Trade and Industry's advisory committee which found against my constituency proposal. Then I discovered that a significant proportion of the people involved had no connection with my region. I had to advise some constituents in fair rent cases not to appeal because I discovered that a rent tribunal was excessively representative of families of estate agents and solicitors, most of whom may well have been politically sensitive and acceptable to Treasury Ministers.

We have seen the proliferation of Government sympathisers in the health authorities and a tremendous decline in the number of appointments of people who do not share the ideology that is currently fashionable in the Government. I am not restricting my criticism to matters that affect only Opposition Members because some matters would not be acceptable to those who control the destiny of this nation.

We need to have an assurance from Ministers that the principal qualifications of those required to serve on consumer committees is not just the knowledge of what one does with an electric light switch, possession of a Conservative party card and adherence to the currently popular fashion in the Conservative party. I hope that the interests of the consumer will be well served and that they will receive priority over the interests of the political party in power.

Mr. Haynes: I remember the debate in Committee on this matter and on that occasion we were not at all satisfied. That is why we have come back to the issue. We are looking for satisfaction in this debate. The Government brag that the Bill is in the interests of the consumer. If that is the case, why does not the Minister cough up? We are asking him straightforwardly for proper representation for the consumer on these bodies. *[Interruption.]* I wish that he would not speak to his Parliamentary Private Secretary while I am trying to make an important point. If the Minister's ears were a bit larger, he might hear what was being said.

We are looking for fairness for the consumer. We do not want the committees loaded with Tories. We want

[Mr. Haynes]

fairness across the board. The Minister must not load the committees with Tory mouthpieces, but that will happen if we are not careful. I hope that he takes on board what is being said and especially what I am saying. I shall probably have more to say later during the evening or the morning, but I want the Minister to understand quite clearly that I am speaking on behalf of the people that I represent. They want a fair crack of the whip for the consumer. I hope that the Minister will come across and give us what we are looking for because he did not do that upstairs.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): It is necessary to say a word or two about the Scottish consultative committees and the consumer committees that will be established by the Bill. As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has said, there is a marginally different situation in the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board. That board and the new company will have a geographical area that is larger in terms of length but not in terms of population than from the north of England to Land's End. It will extend from Campbeltown in the south, which is almost, but not quite, the most southerly point in Scotland—some people might say that it is almost in Northern Ireland—right up to the most northerly house connected to the electricity supply in Unst, in Shetland.

That is an enormous geographical spread and places on the Government a responsibility, which so far they have not met, to ensure that that geographical distance is properly represented on the committee. The two amendments make some effort to achieve that. Any committee will have a difficult job to do better than the present North of Scotland Consultative Council, which I believe is the best of the councils at advising us about the needs of its area. The briefings from that council have been first-class.

The new consumers' committees must properly represent an area's consumers. The committee members should not be appointed as a result of their political interests or because of any connections with the electricity supply industry. In Scotland we have the advantage because the Government are rapidly running out of Tories to put on those committees in Scotland. The Government are trying desperately, but there are not many Tories left there and the few that are left are easily recognisable. We have no great problem in saying that such and such is a political appointment because that person is a Tory. In fact, there is a joke about the man in a paper hat who is the only Tory left in Scotland.

The consumers' committees in Scotland must represent the consumers. I would prefer it if there were legal constraints on the consumers' committees under the director to ensure that local committees are appointed in each of the areas covered by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board to ensure local representation.

Even if the committees have proper representation, the committee members will have problems meeting regularly. It will be extremely difficult for anyone appointed to the committees to travel from Campbeltown to Perth or Inverness or from Unst to Inverness. The Minister must assure us that there will be no political appointments to the committees and that people will not be appointed because they have connections with the electricity supply industry. The committee members should be genuine consumers who know more about an area and its problems than about electricity supply. I hope that the Minister will respond to my points.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Clause 2 provides for consumers' committees to be attached to each public electricity supplier in the United Kingdom. That will ensure that the regional dimension, as set out in the amendments is achieved. In response to the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), I can state that that includes the north of Scotland dimension which will have its own consumers' committee.

We are not in favour of providing for special pre-defined interest groups, regional or otherwise. In future, we want to see the appointment of people who, if possible, know something about the electricity industry, and that is defined in clause 2(4). That answers points raised by the hon. Members for Cathcart, for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). The members of the committee will be appointed by the director.

I cannot promise that there will be no Conservatives on the committees. There are so many Conservatives these days and there will be more and more in Scotland. The director will have a very large catchment area to choose from and I am sure that there will be many Conservatives on those committees. However, I assure the House that the appointments will be made by the independent director and not by the Government. That is a major new feature of the Bill and I am happy to give that assurance. We have placed the whole process more at arm's length from the Government. *[Interruption.]* I can see that many Opposition Members would like to intervene. Let us have a little fun; I will give way to the hon. Member for Ashfield.

Mr. Haynes: I resent that remark. The Minister is trying to be funny. He will regret that. I warn the Minister now: he should not be clever.

I want to know whether the Minister or the Department will have any influence on the director, as to who serves on the committees. If one looks at other such bodies, one finds that the Government always have their grubby hands on appointments.

9.45 pm

Mr. Spicer: I happily give the hon. Gentleman a precise answer to his fair question. Committee chairmen will be appointed with the consent of the Secretary of State, but committee members will be appointed by the directors. The general membership of the committees will be independently appointed. I am pleased to give the House that assurance. The hon. Members for Wentworth and for Cathcart made an important point that the Government completely concede, which is that appointments to the committees should be made more independent and further removed from the Government. We agree completely, and that is why we are changing the Bill.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister responded to the points made by myself and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) by saying that at least the North of Scotland board will have a committee attached to it. Will he confirm that as the Bill stands, the membership of the committee, comprising between 10 and 20 persons, could all come from Glasgow—outwith the area served by

the board? Far from different parts of a vast area being represented, it is theoretically possible that not one geographical area under the board's control will be represented.

Mr. Spicer: No doubt that is theoretically possible. We are saying not that we want specialist groups predetermined, but that the sort of people who will represent consumer interests should be a matter for the director within the terms of the Bill. If there is such a difference between the characteristics of areas as the hon. Gentleman suggests, it would make sense, in providing proper consumer representation, to take geographical interests into account. However, we do not want to make that a statutory obligation. Somebody must appoint the members of the committee.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister means that the Government wish to abdicate responsibility.

Mr. Spicer: That is the way that the hon. Gentleman chooses to put it, but I suggest that he has a word with the hon. Members for Wentworth and for Cathcart. Although they represent different parties, they made a strong point. In response, I gave an assurance that there will not be political involvement in appointments, but that they will be the responsibility of the independent director. I believe that that meets the general view of the House that such an arrangement is a good thing.

The reason why, in future, consumers' committees will be an integral part of the regulatory process is clear, and it is one about which we feel strongly. I say in response to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) that one of the radical reforms introduced in the Bill is that there will no longer be merely lobbying organisations shouting their views from outside the industry—on a previous occasion, I used the phrase "from the touchline"—which is largely how the existing consumer committees operate. Under the new arrangements, they will be part of the regulatory body.

In that way, we are enormously strengthening the effectiveness of consumer representatives' involvement in the industry's development. I remind the House that the Electricity Consumers Council thoroughly approves of that new arrangement. It is a radical and great improvement in the involvement of consumer representatives in the affairs of a large industry. I hope that the House welcomes the new structure and accepts the points that I have made. Therefore, I hope that the amendment is withdrawn.

Mr. Barron: The amendment cannot and will not be withdrawn. The Minister continues to fall into the trap that he fell into in Committee. He regards regulation and consumerism as the same thing. That is not the case. I have put not only my arguments but those of consumer organisations which, for many decades, have attempted to represent consumers' interests. They say that the proposed structure of the consumers' committees is not necessarily right. It was said in Committee—I will not say that the Minister said it—that anybody who receives electricity is an electricity consumer. I argued that the chairman of an electricity board receives electricity and is an electricity consumer. But his idea of electricity and the consumption of electricity is different from that of his neighbour up the road who also receives electricity, uses it as a domestic consumer, and pays a quarterly bill. He has a different outlook on the electricity industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he at least accepts that the Electricity Consumers Council has thoroughly approved the new arrangements?

Mr. Barron: Independent consumer bodies are not in a position to be the turkeys who vote for Christmas. Opposition Members would sooner listen to the people who, week in and week out, month in and month out, and year in and year out, have represented people who wanted help and have found the electricity supply industry lacking. We will debate that matter when we talk about fuel poverty. Those people have encountered the problems of consumers within the electricity supply industry. Opposition Members are not happy with the situation.

Once again, as he did in Committee, the Minister has dismissed the issue and said that those who are involved in regulation are therefore involved in the interests of consumers. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) is present. After he made his 20-minute speech, I said that I would refer to him later. Because of his presence on this occasion, I will put the amendment to the vote to see whether hon. Members are in favour of consumers' rights.

Question put, That the amendment be made:

The House divided: **Ayes 71, Noes 174.**

Division No. 144] **[9.52 pm**

AYES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cohen, Harry
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Illsley, Eric
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David

Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill, as amended, stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Electricity Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), again considered.

Clause 3

General duties of Secretary of State and Director

Mr. Illsley: I beg to move amendment No. 134, in page 2, line 40, leave out

'able to finance the carrying on'

and insert

'financially and technically competent of undertaking'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following: Amendment No. 135, in page 2, line 43, after '(2)', insert '(3 and 4)'.

Government amendments Nos. 79 and 80, and the following amendments:

No. 131, in page 3, line 10, leave out 'thereby'.

No. 132, in page 3, line 12, leave out 'to such premises'.

No. 133, in page 3, line 24, after 'efficient', insert 'and economic'.

No. 104, in page 3, line 28, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) In carrying out all their duties the Secretary of State and the Director General shall take into account, in particular, the needs of the low paid, those who are disabled and of pensionable age.'.

No. 146, in page 3, line 30, at end add—

'and in respect of subsection (3)(a)(ii) above, those who are medically dependent on electricity supply, and in respect of subsection (3)(a)(i) above, those on lower incomes.'.

Mr. Illsley: Amendments Nos. 134 and 135 have been tabled in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and others. Amendment No. 134 relates to the duties laid upon the director in relation to licence holders. Among those duties, the director must ensure that a licence holder is able to finance the carrying on of the activities for which he is licensed. Our amendment seeks to introduce a requirement for technical competence as well as financial ability.

In view of recent events in the latter part of 1988 when a business man purchased a power station in South Wales, perhaps the clause itself could do with further strengthening when it comes to the character of the people who want to buy such stations and involve themselves in the industry. In an industry such as electricity generation, distribution and supply, there is an obvious need for the very highest standards of technical competence, not only on the part of the scientists and operatives employed in the industry but on the part of those who will be directly involved in making the financial, investment and planning decisions on behalf of the industry.

A phrase which was bandied about in Committee talked of the responsibility of "keeping the lights on", but there is a little more at stake than that. We have hospitals, schools, offices, factories, foundries, warehouses, mines and any form of building which houses an industry or an enterprise: all rely on a secure supply of electricity. It would be an act of the utmost criminal folly if the supply of electricity to any of these or the supply of electricity in general, together with the future planning and investment requirements of the supply industry, were to be jeopardised by the poor performance of the director in deciding on the financial or technical competence of those who were allowed to invest or take part in the industry.

Yet, as the Bill stands, anyone who can afford to set up in the industry can apply for a licence to do so. There are clauses, particularly clause 7, which impose conditions, but those conditions will be formulated by the director in conjunction with the Secretary of State. It is quite unthinkable that anyone without technical competence would attempt even to consider setting up in the industry, but towards the end of last year it appears that someone actually did so. A Mr. Casfikis purchased a power station in south Wales with the intention of running it. When further investigations were made into the purchase it was found that the gentleman was a man of straw.

If there are profits to be made from the industry, however, the profitable companies will be bought out by others. There will be mergers and takeovers. We have seen this week what can happen when a company decides that it will buy out another company. A major finance house carries out an inquiry into the bona fides of a particular company and a firm of City lawyers advises on the legal aspects. If it is anything like what happened with the House of Fraser, all hell breaks loose. If anything illustrates the dangers of clause 3 as it stands, with the director making the decisions on financial and technical competence, it is the fiasco of the sale of the House of Fraser.

In that case the investigations were undertaken by a City firm of financiers. What chance has the Director General of Electricity Supply in trying to judge the financial and technical competence of a company that wishes to come into the electricity supply industry when the City of London cannot do it? Obviously, in those circumstances a large responsibility is being placed on the shoulders of the director general.

In the private sector, the industry will be subject to takeovers and mergers. They will involve major companies without the slightest interest in electricity, let alone in the security or obligation of supply. The larger companies will consider a generating company as simply another part of their portfolios.

We can expect, too, takeovers from abroad. We can well understand, because of its financial situation, that Electricité de France would very much like to invest in our power companies. Obviously, it will be looking long and hard at what happens after privatisation. There will be indications of overseas takeovers by companies that this country finds, perhaps, offensive or unwanted. What remedy will there be? Those takeovers will take place. There will be nothing to stop them, other than such bodies as the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Office of Fair Trading. However, if those takeovers comply with the regulations, there will be nothing to stop them. I shall cite two examples of such takeovers in the past year in my area. There was the takeover of Rowntree by Nestlé and, in my constituency, the takeover of the Redfearn glass firm by a Swedish company.

The electricity supply industry has 12 area boards and each area board covers a considerable area with a considerable number of consumers. Once those boards begin to be swallowed up by larger companies, obviously there will be a much smaller industry and there will be a move back towards the monopoly.

The structure, as it has been outlined in the White Paper and the Bill, might be put at jeopardy because of takeovers and mergers. Set out in the Bill is a horizontal structure with the separation of generation, distribution and supply. However, in future what will there be to stop the larger companies buying into other aspects of the industry—the supply and distribution sectors—or the suppliers coming back into generation to tie up the loose ends and moving us back into a system of vertical integration?

The area boards or the public electricity suppliers, as they will be known, will have power to have their own generation capabilities. We will therefore start from a small amount of vertical integration which could be increased by mergers of the area boards. We could also see —perish the thought—British Coal, if it is privatised, being bought by the electricity companies. We could see major consumers of electricity being purchased, which will again bring into question coal imports.

What prospects are there for the area boards? They will either be strong enough, or have the financial muscle, to stand alone after privatisation, or, if they have a large industrial customer base, they will stand threatened by the introduction of independent investors who will take away those large industrial customers and leave them at the mercy of the predators, the larger companies within the industry.

If, as we are led to believe, there are upwards of 20 companies ready and waiting to come into the industry, that threat is already there. We have yet to have names put to the 20 companies that have been talked about during the past three months. However, we will obviously take the Minister at his word and believe that the threat from those companies exists.

I shall cite two examples. There is the Yorkshire electricity board, which is my board, and the north eastern board, both of which have a large base of industrial consumers. If we compare those boards with the south eastern electricity board, the reverse is true. That board has a large domestic consumer base and obviously the new boards in the south-east will set off as being more attractive to investors. They will start off with a financial advantage because they will have locked-in customers—the domestic consumer, unlike the industrial consumer, cannot opt out and look to the private generator.

It is important to consider that 49·5 per cent. of the north-eastern board's customers are industrial and that industrial customers account for 52 per cent. of the Yorkshire electricity board's market. The one customer common to both those boards is the coal industry, which is a major consumer of electricity.

10.15 pm

With the introduction of coal and oil imports after privatisation, both aimed at taking away British Coal's share of the market, there will be a further knock-on effect in our areas. The area boards will lose their custom as we face further colliery closures.

[Mr. Illsley]

The Government should reconsider clause 3, especially the duties of the director regarding the financial and technical competence of entrants into the industry. They should tighten the Bill to enable companies or area boards, such as Yorkshire and north-eastern, to fend off the takeover bids with which they are bound to be faced after privatisation.

Dr. Kim Howells: It is important to draw attention to the implications of those parts of the Bill that test the probability that licence holders will seek to secure their hold on particular parts of the market by expanding their operations, as my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) has said, beyond the straightforward business of marketing and selling electricity. We are talking about area boards—licence holders—six of which have annual turnovers of more than £1 billion. Even the smallest, the south Wales board, has an annual turnover of £500,000.

The diversification of the boards is mainly discussed in terms of electricity generation, but I am sure that the Minister is well aware that several boards have been hyperactive in putting together generating projects and, in some cases, joint ventures for power production.

I echo the concern expressed by my hon. Friend. Is the Minister aware that there is a great deal of talk about generating boards buying back into their supplying companies in the future? It has even been suggested that they might buy coal mines as well as other sources of fuel. What implications will that have in terms of the creation of new, future monopolies?

Mr. Michael Spicer: The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsey) has focused on amendment No. 134. I understand the purpose of his introductory remarks, and I listened with great care to what he said.

We believe that the present wording of the Bill is more embracing than amendment No. 134. The present wording enables the director to do what he wants to do—to check the financial credentials of a potential new entrant and to bear in mind that entrant's future viability when considering such matters as pricing formula and his other duties. The present wording meets the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman, especially in relation to clause 3(1)(b), and offers other advantages.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) was concerned about anti-competitive practices. So would we be, if there were the kind of anti-competitive practices that he has in mind. The normal anti-competitive rules and laws will apply. The Bill makes specific provision for the operation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and deals with the interrelationship between the powers of the director general to protect competition and the more general powers of the MMC.

While we would not want to restrict any reasonable diversification or development by any company, we agree that there should be consideration of anti-competitive practices. We think that the current institutions and laws for protecting the industry from the predatory behaviour that the hon. Gentleman has in mind are adequate.

On the basis of that explanation, I hope that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central will withdraw his amendment. Certainly we would not accept any of the amendments, and particularly those which, contrary to what the hon. Member for Pontypridd was concerned about, are aimed at restricting competition and competitive pressures.

Mr. Illsley: In view of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and the points that I made in my contribution, we still feel that the Bill needs strengthening, particularly as regards financial mergers and takeovers. As the Minister is not willing to accept amendments on the point, we will divide the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 60, Noes 160.

Division No. 145] **[10.21 pm**

AYES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cohen, Harry
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Illsley, Eric
Kennedy, Charles
Lambie, David
Livsey, Richard
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Radice, Giles
Robertson, George
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Griffiths and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles

Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclean, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 79, in page 3, line 4, after 'charged', insert 'to tariff customers'.

No. 80, in page 3, line 5, leave out 'by them'.

No. 2, in page 3, line 24, after 'them', insert—

'(bb) to protect the public from dangers arising from the generation, transmission or supply of electricity;'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Mr. Barron: I beg to move amendment No. 136, in page 3, line 27, at end insert—

'(d) to promote the efficient and economic use of heat co-generated with electricity in combined heat and power plants or stations.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 1, in clause 30, page 24, line 43, at end add—

'(4A) That electricity generated in a combined heat and power plant shall be treated for the purposes of subsection (4)(a) above as generated by a non-fossil fuel generating station for the proportion of the electricity produced that is equivalent to the measured quantity of heat distributed at a temperature greater than 60°C or more from the power station.'.

No. 149, in clause 30, page 25, line 17, at end add

'; and electricity generated in a combined heat and power plant shall be deemed to be generated by non-fossil fuel'.

Mr. Barron: Clause 3 relates to the general duties of the Secretary of State and the Director General of Electricity Supply after privatisation. That is a crucial matter which we debated with great interest in Committee and should like to discuss again on Report.

The amendment seeks to give the Secretary of State and the director the duty

"to promote the efficient and economic use of heat co-generated with electricity in combined heat and power plants or stations."

It does not say exactly what type of plant that should be, and I do not want to go into that in great detail. However, I ought to give the reasons for the amendment.

Like many others, we believe that combined heat and power has not been treated properly. That form of co-generation has been in use in this country for a very long time, and we believe that there is a case for treating it effectively under the new regimes that are to take over from the Central Electricity Generating Board. Most people have no doubt that combined heat and power can make an important contribution. Indeed, larger schemes could make a dramatic contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gases—an issue which the Cabinet, and in particular the Prime Minister, has brought up. Over the last few months the Government have been saying that they are deeply concerned about the situation. The larger CHP schemes in this country could reduce emissions by at least 3 per cent.—and in some cases are doing so.

The Government tell us about the plans that are in the pipeline for smaller generators throughout the country after privatisation of the electricity supply industry. Experts predict that small-scale combined heat and power schemes, together with the larger ones, could cut greenhouse gas emission by up to 10 per cent. It is recognised that the wider use of waste heat for electricity generation would also result in savings for industry and for national and local government.

Let me mention briefly one or two of the current schemes which demonstrate the way in which many areas benefit, not just in the generation of electricity. The wider application of combined heat and power schemes in urban areas would stimulate urban regeneration, particularly in inner cities. For a number of years—certainly since the last general election—this has been a major theme of the Prime Minister. She has said that she will take effective action in the inner cities. We do not see much effective action being taken by the Government on CHP, despite the fact that such action could make an important contribution to urban regeneration. If the Government were to accept amendment No. 136, they would be going some way towards finding ways of doing that.

Two papers were published recently by the Government. I understand that one of them shows that up to 4,000 sites in this country could benefit from combined heat and power. The other, which I think was produced by the Energy Efficiency Office, says that up to 1,500 major industries could be using combined heat and power. Perhaps the Minister will mention that in his intervention. So this is not a small matter; the system could be applied widely and quite flexibly.

Our amendments, particularly No. 136, would enable the opportunities to be grasped. They would put combined heat and power on at least an equal footing with the generating options that are being promoted in the Bill. I do not intend to return to yesterday's debate, but I remind the House that the Government are making sure that we will have nuclear generation for a considerable time. The same could be done for combined heat and power.

There is an amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) about giving some form of protection that was offered by the Secretary of State yesterday. The Secretary of State talked about a new tranche of capacity in non-fossil fuels being reserved exclusively for renewables. We shall see what the Secretary of State does about an amendment that could result in a combined heat and power tranche. If he undertook to consider that proposal, he would probably have the support of the whole House.

Successful combined heat and power schemes are being organised despite, rather than with, the assistance of the Government, mostly in areas controlled by Labour authorities. For example, Labour-controlled Waltham Forest council has won a major award from British Gas for its pioneering scheme which, among other things, is helping to keep the elderly of that Greater London area warm.

In Sheffield, the Labour-controlled city council has created the first European-based joint venture to develop a combined heat and power scheme, and in the first stage of that scheme local tenants are receiving heat from an incinerator burning domestic waste. It will be a privilege for me tomorrow to visit the area and observe that scheme.

The Labour city council of Leicester is actively supporting a joint venture with the private sector to introduce a major combined heat and power scheme. Newcastle, another Labour-controlled area, is continuing to work with the local business community and the electricity industry to create a combined scheme for the area.

In south London, the Labour councils of Greenwich, Southwark and Lewisham are working with a few private sector companies to initiate a combined heat and power scheme based on energy from waste. The hon. Member for Erewash and others will be aware of the amount of heat that is wasted in power stations. Let us harness that energy and send it out into the community to heat hospitals and domestic dwellings and thereby contribute to the nation's energy resources.

In a BBC television interview on 15 January, the Secretary of State said that he supported the idea of combined heat and power schemes, and he claimed that CHP would be encouraged by, and CHP technology would gain from, privatisation. There is no evidence of the Government turning those fine words into deeds.

On Second Reading, I referred to the way in which the Energy Act 1983 had failed to provide openings for new and diverse forms of energy generation. The CEGB and other generating companies have made it impossible for those interested in combined heat and power schemes to get into the market and sell electricity. Nothing has been said by the Government in these debates to encourage those who are trying to promote combined heat and power schemes that this legislation will prove more helpful to them than the 1983 Act. The Government should accept the amendment and show their willingness to move forward on combined heat and power in the interests of the environment and the economy. There are many benefits to be had from combined heat and power.

Earlier in the debate the Grimethorpe fluidised bed project in south Yorkshire was mentioned. That is a way of enabling small generators to use coal cleanly and it avoids much of the air pollution that arises from the burning of fossil fuels, especially coal. I thought that the Minister would say that the Government would fill the gap that British Coal has encountered with that project. That project on fluidised bed combustion leads the world, and if we do not make sure that the final phase, the topping phase, is funded other countries will take the lead.

10.45 pm

Just before the Easter recess I was in Japan where fluidised bed combustion is being developed. We must not let our project fall at the end of the year. When it is commercialised in perhaps one or two years it could well fit into combined heat and power schemes. If we let the project lapse, I have no doubt that in 10 to 15 years the Government will buy Japanese technology on fluidised bed combustion, just as we are currently buying Japanese technology on flue gas desulphurisation, a technology which has been working in Japan for over a decade in coal-fired power stations. This year we have had to buy it for our big coal burners and have had to start a programme using Japanese technology.

The Opposition are in favour of developing British technology. The Minister spoke about the Grimethorpe fluidised bed project and said that he would probably be able to make a statement about it, but wanted more commitment from industry. That is like approaching a potential car buyer and saying to him, "I want you to invest in a new car. However, we have not quite finished the engine technology and we don't know exactly how it will work." No car salesman, not even the Arthur Daleys among Conservative Members, would try to sell such cars on the high streets of Britain.

We need to prove the technology that will fit in well with combined heat and power and Britain's technologists must be allowed to continue their development. The project needs about £11 million, but it has not been offered that in the debate. That money is required over three years and it is a mere pittance compared to the amount that the Bill is writing off in the nuclear industry. Not hundreds of millions but thousands of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money will be set against the excessive costs of the nuclear industry in the years ahead.

Month in and month out we have had to fight and argue with the Government in an attempt to get a commitment from them to follow private money into Grimethorpe to make sure that the technology is proved and that we are world leaders in the clean combustion of coal. Amendment No. 136 would commit the Secretary of State and the Director General of Electricity Supply to take seriously combined heat and power and all its benefits. I hope that the Government will say that they are at least prepared to look further at the matter. If they do not give that commitment, we may consider testing the amendment in a Division.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): I should like to speak to amendment No. 1. In 1973 I made my first speech in the House on energy efficiency and at that time hardly anybody had heard of combined heat and power. Over the past 15 years I have continued the campaign. As a result, I have an interest to declare because I have recently become a consultant to Associated Heat Services plc, the major company involved in the management of combined heat and power systems.

The arguments developed over many years in favour of energy efficiency were intended primarily to conserve a finite resource, to use it and to produce it less wastefully. The argument now has additional force for environmental reasons. If the Government are right in the assumption that they have expressed again this evening that world and United Kingdom electricity demand is going to grow, there is little hope for the planet. If the greenhouse effect is shown to be caused by global warming as a result of burning fossil fuels, there is little hope for the planet if we continue to produce our electricity in the present wasteful way.

At the moment, we throw away two thirds of the fuel that we put into a power station by cooling water. That creates two or three times as much carbon dioxide—greenhouse gases—than is necessary. We could convert the cooling water into useful energy.

I maintain that amendment No. 1 is modest. I suggest that electricity produced combined with hot water should be classed as a non-fossil fuel, but only that proportion of electricity which displaces fossil fuel which would otherwise have to be burnt if the hot water from the combined heat and power plant was not being distributed and used for space heating. As a combined heat and power plant produces a thermal efficiency of about 70 per cent. —or twice as much as an electricity-only plant—and as nearly half the fuel is converted into useful hot water, that must displace other fossil fuel which would otherwise have to be burnt to provide space heating. We are really burning twice as much fossil fuel in this country than is necessary and we are doing twice over—once in our power stations and throwing it all away and then again to provide space heating.

When electricity is produced in a CHP plant, fossil fuel is saved. The proportion of saved fossil fuel which is sold as useful heat for heating water should be entitled to be categorised within the non-fossil fuel band in the Bill.

I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Minister will give this amendment serious consideration because this is such a modest proposal. From our electricity production, we throw away about 60 million tonnes of coal-equivalent and we must bear in mind that that produces a considerable amount of CO_2-type greenhouse gas. We

[Mr. Peter Rost]

burn the same quantity of fossil fuel all over again to provide our space heating. Therefore, CHP can make an important contribution to reducing CO_2.

Yesterday in this debate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State conceded that there will be a special slot for renewable energy categorised as non-fossil fuel. Why did he do that? He justified it on the grounds that we need diversity and security of energy supply and also because we want to do something to alleviate the environment threat.

The arguments in favour of this amendment are the same as those espoused by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. By using hot water from electricity production instead of throwing it away, we create more diversity, more energy efficiency and we reduce the greenhouse effect.

In recent years there has been increasing pressure from the EC, which will undoubtedly lead to a firm directive that we use energy more efficiently, less wastefully, and environmentally more acceptably. Combined heat and power is one of the EC's strongest recommendations. It is important that it is made to Britain, because we are bottom of the European league. Millions of citizens elsewhere in Europe already benefit from cheap heating in their buildings, which comes from power stations combined with electricity production. We have a lot to do to catch up.

Government studies over recent years identified and confirmed the enormous potential for CHP in the United Kingdom. I strongly support the remarks of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), but I believe that if the Government cannot go as far as the Opposition amendment goes they should at least seriously consider my modest proposal.

Combined heat and power is the only technology that can reduce fossil fuel burn and at the same time provide new electrical generating capacity—which are both urgent priorities for the future. I challenge my hon. Friend the Minister and other right hon. and hon. Members to name any other energy technology that can do the same. Combined heat and power is the only technology also to offer the biggest potential for greater energy efficiency. The Combined Heat and Power Association, which supports my amendment and helped me to present it, has for many years argued that the benefits of CHP are far wider than those that I described. They include urban renewal, better housing, better health, and the reduction of fuel poverty.

The Select Committee on Energy is currently conducting an inquiry into the greenhouse effect. The evidence already received from many authoritative sources confirms that combined heat and power will reduce greenhouse gases to a greater extent, and more economically, than any alternative. There are several ways of reducing CO_2, including the use of nuclear and renewable fuels and energy conservation. However, they all involve a higher economic penalty than CHP, which is the least-cost option for reducing CO_2 in the atmosphere.

If or when a consensus is reached by scientists internationally—which they have made a move towards reaching at Toronto—that, if we want to save life on earth, we are obliged to reduce fossil fuel burn, or at least greenhouse gases, then the Government will be able to congratulate themselves if, tonight, they supported my amendment. By doing so, they will be recognising that there are very long lead times in making changes to our energy patterns and in developing from the present inefficient method of electricity production to the more efficient system of combined heat and power.

Rather than defer action now and be forced to take crash measures to meet international standards—which will prove far more costly—the Government should consider more seriously at this stage what will undoubtedly need to be done in future years. My hon. Friend the Minister will undoubtedly acknowledge that combined heat and power is already economic. He may ask why it should need an extra stimulus. Industrial coal generation is taking off in this country—it needs to, as we are bottom of that league also—because of electricity privatisation. For the first time, it is offering a level playing field.

11 pm

Large scale city combined heat and power has more self-financing problems. Its rates of return are much more marginal. Schemes in Sheffield, Leicester and Newcastle will have difficulty in making more than a marginal commercial rate of return because of the large up-front capital investment required to lay the infrastructure for hot water mains pipes. When we have them, we will have cheap heat for ever more, but the up-front capital investment is large. That is why there is an argument for this modest incentive.

The Government's case for supporting the nuclear industry and renewals is justified for reasons of diversity, security, the environment, and energy efficiency. But they will be costly. If combined heat and power can be given the modest incentive suggested by the amendment, we will achieve the same objectives, but without the same economic penalty. The marginal increase in the cost of electricity that would result from this amendment will help to provide the necessary capital for developing heat nodes in our cities.

The case for the special slot is overwhelming. For once, the Government could be seen to lead the European Community in providing an incentive, even if we are at the bottom of the league in the development of combined heat and power. By giving that incentive, the Government will also encourage the new technologies that the hon. Member for Rother Valley mentioned. The clean burn coal technologies for the fluidised bed which is adopted by combined heat and power will be helped by the amendment. The major encouragement which that would give to greater energy efficiency and the help that it would provide for a more effective and economic contribution to reducing the greenhouse gases for future generations is overwhelming. I hope that my hon. Friend will respond constructively by accepting the amendment, or at least by saying that he will give the matter further consideration.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) is right to remind the House of his long commitment to the concept of combined heat and power. My commitment to it may not be as long-standing as his, but I recall addressing the annual conference of the Combined Heat and Power Association almost a decade ago. The arguments that were advanced by the hon. Gentleman—he has been advancing them for a long time—were advanced then.

The cause of combined heat and power should by now be more firmly established. Had it not been for the

Government's dogmatic approach in the 1980s, we would have seen a greater achievement and greater potential for international advance and international trading opportunities than we do now. One wishes the project well, but it is a great pity that the Government had to put dogma before achievement in the early 1980s. I can evisage enormous advantages from combined heat and power associated with fluidised bed combustion.

I am pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is present, because it will allow me to trespass for one moment on the environmental effects which may follow the development of combined heat and power.

The Agriculture Minister will know that there are anxieties about the scale of fish farming around our coasts. It is appropriate for the use of combined heat and power to produce hot water, but not merely for warmth and comfort. Many people in our towns and cities desperately need warmth and comfort. We might be able to use some of that hot water to promote inland fish farming. That might save the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from the almost illegal action in which it is involved by allowing or encouraging the importation of manila clams, the farming of which is becoming a serious risk to our coasts and estuarial areas. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will save my having to raise that matter in the House on another occasion by examining that grave problem this evening. Combined heat and power has benefits that may go far wider than mere energy or direct environmental interests.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for tabling the amendment, and I hope that if the Government force us into the Lobbies in support of this just and wise cause, some Conservative Members will join the hon. Member for Erewash, who deserves the tribute of the House.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I shall speak briefly because I am a signatory to the amendment. I believe that the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) has come up with a simple, straightforward and rather ingenious amendment. It simply asks that the net benefit that combined heat and power can achieve should be credited to the non-fossil fuel quota. That seems to be an eminently reasonable proposition. It will probably be required anyway because it is doubtful whether the industry will otherwise be able to achieve a quota of the order that the Government seem to be describing.

The amendment would have definite environmental and efficiency benefits and could lead to the encouragement of combined heat and power which, as the hon. Member for Erewash has rightly pointed out, has considerable potential in the United Kingdom—much of it untapped. His own tireless fight for this cause over many years is appreciated by the House. He has done a service tonight by tabling a useful, constructive and ingenious amendment. I hope that if the Government cannot accept it, they will consider it. It will be of considerable benefit to all if they do so.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is getting late, so the House will want me to be brief.

I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) and other hon. Members who have made the point that combined heat and power is an important potential source of energy. I also associate myself with what my hon. Friend said about the potential beneficial environmental effects. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is right to congratulate my hon. Friend on all that he has done over the years to keep this technology in the forefront of people's minds.

I do not fully share my hon. Friend's anxieties about the future. Existing private generation now amounts to 3 GW of electricity and 2 GW of that is represented by combined heat and power plant, which is a substantial figure. I know that my hon. Friend has already made the point that that is industrial plant, and I shall deal with that in a moment. However, if we are looking to the immediate future, there is ample evidence that the very existence of the Bill is already bringing forward much new, independent generation. We know of about 7 GW of new capacity potentially in the pipeline. Of that, about 1·1 GW is of combined heat and power, such as the Leicester energy scheme and the British Sugar scheme at Brigg.

Industry is, therefore, proposing to increase its investment in combined heat and power by more than 50 per cent. and that is just a beginning. We do not think that there is a need, with respect to industry, to subsidise and artificially support combined heat and power. It is not part of this Government's plans to subsidise schemes which are clearly profitable to private industry and which make sound economic sense.

Mr. Rost: If the amendment were accepted, there would be no question of the industrial side being subsidised because industrial combined heat and power produces electricity and processed heat for industry's own purposes. It does not sell it.

Mr. Spicer: I appreciate that my hon. Friend is especially concerned about the domestic side of this technology. Government policy in general and the Bill in several specific ways about which I shall briefly remind the House are addressing the more general problem to which my hon. Friend is referring. We have spent, for example, £750,000 on studies in Leicester, Belfast and Edinburgh, where there are city schemes. We are determined that the rating handicap under which this particular aspect of the industry has suffered should be altered so it is put on to an equal basis.

The Bill will not only give those wishing to engage in this form of technology free access to the system, but there will now be a duty on public electricity supply companies to buy from the most economic source. Therefore, if CHP is the most economic source, that duty will take effect. Perhaps most importantly in the context that my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash was discussing under clause 9(3) CHP operators will have statutory undertaker powers comparable to those enjoyed by the present utilities. For city schemes that is a major step forward.

In making this necessarily brief reply to my hon. Friend —given the time of night—and although I recognise entirely that this is an enormous subject, in which he is well versed, I must advise him that as a result of our privatisation proposals the prospects for private investment in CHP are looking very healthy. We are providing fair market conditions in which CHP schemes can compete freely with other forms of generation and heat supply. Their future will depend not on further public funding of subsidy but on their ability to operate competitively. Given its thermal efficiency, which my hon. Friend mentioned, and its versatility, CHP is well placed to do just that. In the light of that explanation, I hope that my hon.

[Mr. Spicer]

Friend the Member for Erewash and other hon. Members will feel able to withdraw their amendments, well intended though they are.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry to have to say that all that the Minister of State has done in his brief reply is to show how very much less he knows about CHP than does his hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost).

I shall go through what the Minister said about the glowing future that he envisages for CHP after privatisation. He said that 7 GW of new capacity is being promised or discussed with the Department and that 1·1 GW of that is CHP. That may well be true, but as far as we are aware—I shall be interested to know the views of the hon. Member for Erewash on this—the whole of that 1·1 GW falls into two categories. The first is industrial, which is sometimes known as micro-CHP, where the heat grid, led off from the power station, is on land that is within the control of the generator, Slough Estates or Tunnel Refineries. CHP programmes have also been started by Labour local authorities for the specific purpose of carrying out an experiment, which public authorities such as a local authority can do and have done in places such as Leicester, Sheffield and Newcastle. Other schemes have already been referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). However, we are not aware of any breakthrough of the kind that the hon. Member for Erewash and my hon. Friends have been calling for, such as some kind of boost in policy terms —not a subsidy—that would establish the principle of how CHP should work in the new set-up, outside the property of the generator.

The Minister is right—all hon. Members know that converting one's generators to the CHP mode can be economic in places such as leisure centres with a swimming pool where one wants summer heat, in hospitals or old people's homes where summer heat is needed because of the demands of the elderly and so on, and in premises where there have to be standby generators, such as large telephone exchanges or hospitals. That is micro-CHP and we have already conceded that that is taking off. We know that that will produce a large saving on fossil fuel and that it will contribute to reduced energy costs and to a reduction in the greenhouse gas pollution load.

But that is not the point. The point is that the Bill as presently structured is biased against CHP— *[Interruption.]* It is not a question of a subsidy. Without the amendments that the hon. Member for Erewash and we have been proposing, the Bill will be biased against CHP for the simple reason that the duty laid on the Secretary of State and the director is to see that electricity —and only electricity—is generated in the most efficient and economic manner. In the CHP mode of generating electricity, one takes the steam off the turbines at a high temperature. That is not the optimum way of generating electricity because one would be virtually excluded under the Bill from operating an electricity power station in the CHP mode. One would not be generating electricity, taken on its own, in the most economic manner because one would be taking the hot water off before it had gone through the turbines to the maximum possible degree for keeping electricity prices down to the minimum.

11.15 pm

The point about our amendment, and that of the hon. Member for Erewash, is that it would permit the optimisation of two things at once—the taking off of the heat and the generation of the electricity. If anyone thinks that that is a minor point, he should look at the Government's own document on this subject, Energy Paper 20, in which it is illustrated. It is the Government's own calculation, which no one has contested, that if one supplies heat by generating electricity afresh to heat a room, and this is taken to be one unit of heat provided by electricity, one can do it at less than half that price if one does it by gas; but if one does it by CHP, by the offtake of the hot water, the cost goes down to one seventh of that of heating the room by freshly generated electricity.

That is the kind of point that we need to drill into the Minister tonight. The Bill is biased against CHP. An amendment of this sort is needed if we are to have CHP on a level playing field basis. If the Government want us to take them seriously, if they want us to believe that they are interested in fuel efficiency and in the greenhouse effect, and not just in making speeches at conferences or, as the Secretary of State will do next week, lecturing the Soviet Union on "British is best" in energy technology, they must think very seriously about the Bill and amend it so that it really gives a chance to "British is best" technology, which is there, waiting to be implemented if only there is a level playing field.

We know that we are behind in the application of CHP on other than a micro basis. We know that micro-CHP is taking off in the way that I have described. What we are not satisfied about is that large-scale CHP can take off unless the Government take a serious look at the legislation and at the amendments suggested.

On the grapevine we are told that, provided the Government persuade us and the hon. Member for Erewash not to press this to a vote, the Central Policy Unit, the 10 Downing street think tank, will recommend to the Department that it should support these amendments or something similar. I know that I should not be saying too much this week about 10 Downing street and leaks that have emanated from the staff there, but on the assumption that the information that we have had on the grapevine is even better than that of Sir Leon Brittan, now that he has emigrated temporarily to Europe, we will not press this to the vote. We shall expect to see some action from the Minister of State, taking, if not our advice, at least the advice from 10 Downing street, which is a far more important source

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Morgan: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Rost: I am sorry, I thought that the hon. Member had sat down.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry. Was the hon. Member asking me to give way?

Mr. Rost: No.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry. I do not really want to repeat my last line. I was just going to say that 10 Downing street will, I am sure, tell the Minister to do the right thing.

Mr. Rost *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman has addressed the House once. He cannot speak again.

Amendment negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We now turn to amendment No.——

Mr. Rost: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I tabled an amendment and I have not yet withdrawn it. I ask you to——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's amendment No. 1 was chosen for debate in a group of amendments selected by Mr. Speaker, the lead amendment of which was No. 136 which I have just put to the House and which the House has negatived.

Clause 4

PROHIBITION ON UNLICENSED SUPPLY ETC.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 4, line 14, leave out

'of high voltage lines and electrical plant'

and insert

'which consists (wholly or mainly) of high voltage lines and electrical plant and is'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments:

No. 137, in page 4, line 15, after 'for', insert

'the pumped-storage of electricity or'.

Government amendment No. 4.

No. 127, in clause 8, page 7, line 10, after 'transmission', insert

'and generation by pumped storage.'.

Government amendments Nos. 8, 51, 52, 64 and 67.

Mr. Spicer: The Government consider that the amendments are technical or drafting, with the exception of amendments Nos. 51 and 52, which meet one of the matters discussed in Committee. I believe that the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) raised in Committee the fact that the director general would be under a duty, if these amendments were brought forward, to publish information on performance standards at least once a year. We said that we would look at that matter and we have tabled the amendments in response to that debate.

We cannot accept Opposition amendments Nos. 137 and 127 because we do not see their point. The amendments aim to define pump storage as part of transmission. Transmission and generation, which pump storage is, are different things. Although, of course, pump storage is concerned with system stability, it is not the same as transmission. There is nothing to stop the transmission companies using pump storage in any way they wish, nor, indeed, to stop other pump storage stations coming forward, if they are economic, and are to be treated as generating companies. We may hear some concern to which I have not alluded, but we do not want to confuse, as do the Opposition amendments, transmission with generation. We would oppose amendments Nos. 127 and 137 if they were pressed, although I cannot see why they would be.

Mr. Morgan: I simply wish clearly to establish whether the National Grid Company will have a transmission licence. If not, how will it operate Dinorwig?

Mr. Spicer: Dinorwig will operate on the basis of generation licences. The National Grid Company will call up Dinorwig in precisely the same way as it calls up any other station. Therefore, there is no problem. It is part of its operations, but there is no problem about the licensing of future companies.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 5

EXEMPTIONS FROM SECTION 4

Amendment made: No. 4, in page 4, line 21, leave out 'so specified' and insert 'specified in the order'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 6

LICENCES AUTHORISING SUPPLY ETC.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I beg to move amendment No. 138, in page 5, line 3, at beginning insert 'Subject to sub-section 11 below,'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 139, in page 6, line 8, at end add—

(11) no licence to supply electricity shall be extended by virtue of subsection 2(b) above, to cover an area without consultation with the consumers' committee for that area.'.

No. 165, in clause 7, page 6, line 17, at end insert—

'(c) conditions requiring any contract between a public electricity supplier and a person authorised to generate electricity which is of more than ten years duration to be referred to the Director prior to the contract being agreed.'.

No. 175, in clause 9, page 7, line 36, at end insert—

'(2A) A licence under section 6(1) above shall provide that Schedule 3 to this Act shall not have effect in relation to a license holder if—

(a) the owner of the land affected by a compulsory purchase order or the person whose livelihood would be affected by such an order objects on the grounds that his livelihood would be affected;

(b) a member of the public objects on the grounds that the natural environment or wildlife would be damaged.

(2B) Where objections are lodged under (2A) above the licence holder may appeal to the Director General, who shall take into consideration the measures taken by the licence holder to expand capacity by means other than the building or expansion of plant.'.

No. 176, in page 8, line 18 at end insert—

'(6) Nothing in this section or in the schedules mentioned in this section relating to compulsory purchase shall affect the holding or outcome of a planning inquiry into an application to contruct or expand buildings or installations for the purpose of the generation, transmission or supply of electricity.'.

No. 179, in schedule 3, page 72, line 5 at end insert—

'(2A) Such consent may be given:

(a) in an emergency, or where the powers are to be used to comply with a notice given under Section 15 of this Act, only after reasonable notice has been given to the owner and occupier of any land;

(b) in all other circumstances, only after the consent of the owner and occupier of the land has been obtained, which consent shall not be unreasonably withheld.

(3) Any question whether such consent is or is not unreasonably withheld shall be referred to and determined by the Secretary of State.'

No. 129, in clause 10, page 8, line 21 after second 'licence', insert

'and the consumers committee appropriate to that area.'.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

No. 140, in clause 11, page 9, line 10 at end add—

(c) notwithstanding subsection (i) above the Director must refer to the Monopolies and Mergers commission any modification he proposes to the conditions of a licence, where the holder of one licence under Clause 6(1)(c) above is proposing to acquire another licence holder under that section.'.

No. 141, in page 9, line 10 at end insert—

(d) notwithstanding subsection (i) above the Director must refer to the Monopolies and Mergers commission any modification he proposes to the conditions of a licence, where the holder of a licence is proposed to be acquired by another person.'.

No. 143, in page 9, line 23 at end add

'any observations of the consumers' committee for that area on the reference with regard to subsections (1) and (2) above.'.

No. 142, in page 10, line 3 at end add—

'(c) any observations of the consumers' committee for that area on the reference with regard to subsections (1) (2) and (3) above.'.

Mr. Radice: The amendments concern the licensing arrangements and contracts which I believe go to the heart of the Bill. The Secretary of State has said that electricity privatisation, unlike other privatisations, creates and enhances competition and produces what is called downward pressure on prices. The problem, of course, for the Secretary of State is that he must create the conditions in which he can successfully sell the industry to private investors and ensure certainty of supply. In the end what the Government have come up with is what is being called the big fix arrangement—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State appears surprised at the phrase "big fix". I should have thought that he had become very familiar with it, as he invented it.

The big fix regime is a licensing system in which—I quote not from a Labour party document but from a very good publication—

"the interests of the privatised companies are balanced out and protected as far as possible; where new entrants will, initially at least, find it difficult to enter the market, and where prices are very strongly regulated."

In Committee we had one of the fiercest, the most heated and, I believe, the most revealing debates over licensing and the issue of contracts. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made one of his most able speeches and demonstrated that the licensing and contract proposals were extremely complicated. One hon. Member had to ask for a blackboard to try to assist other hon. Members to understand the proposals. The Minister also had trouble understanding them.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend says that the Minister also had some trouble. Is he aware that the Minister is not listening to his argument, but is busy consulting the advisers in a great conference in the corner of the Chamber? Presumably he is trying to get some information to answer the debate, but surely it would be better if he listened to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Radice: The Minister had such problems throughout the Committee, that he was almost always consulting non-existent advisers while Opposition Members were speaking—that is par for the course.

The licensing arrangements and contracts were specifically designed in the case of electricity supply to rule out competition at the initial stage and to introduce, at best, a limited form of competition only in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield also forced the Government to reveal the existence of the "contract working party", which has been established to arrange the big fix. In the so-called initial contracts for existing capacity, which could last for up to 10 years, the big fix ensures that there is no significant competition because the yardsticks do not apply.

In Committee the Government admitted that, in respect of contracts for future capacity, those contracts will be allowed to have take-or-pay clauses. It is unlikely that companies will enter the industry unless such clauses exist. If it is correct that the yardsticks will not apply in the contracts for existing capacity and that contracts for future capacity will contain take-or-pay clauses, it is extremely hard for the Government then to argue that those contracts will promote meaningful competition in the day-to-day operations of the industry.

Our amendment is designed to make the best of a bad job. It would ensure that all long-term contracts come under the specific supervision of the director general. Under our amendment he would be able to call in all long-term contracts prior to their agreement.

The amendment is sensible and constructive and a Government who were serious about competition would accept it. I suspect that, despite all the claims by the Secretary of State and the Minister about competition, the Government are more interested in ensuring the successful sale of a public industry. If they reject the amendment it will confirm our case, made so ably by my hon. Friends in Committee, that the Government believe not in competition or in helping the consumer, but only in privatisation, irrespective of the merits of the case.

Mr. Beith: I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 175 and 176, although, at this time of night, it would be more honest to say that it has fallen to me to speak to amendments Nos. 175 and 176.

Amendment No. 175 relates to the compulsory purchase powers in the Bill. They have caused a great deal of anxiety to many people, some of whom have, in the past, voted for the Conservative party. They are a little puzzled about why the party which they have long supported has granted such draconian—they would consider them Socialist—compulsory purchase powers to private companies. The amendment would change the procedure so that, in certain circumstances, it would be the director general's duty, if appealed to, to decide the matter and to take into consideration the alternatives that were available to the company concerned to expand capacity in some other way instead of building the proposed plant or expanding an existing one.

11.30 pm

Two sets of circumstances are envisaged. The first involves the owner of land affected by compulsory purchase whose livelihood would be affected. I quote the National Farmers Union:

"The NFU is opposed in principle to the granting of compulsory purchase powers to private companies. We believe that where PLCs need to acquire rights in land, or land itself, they should pay the open-market rate for those interests. That should include any development value . . . At the very least, the PLCs should have to seek the consent of the owners and occupiers of the land which they wish to acquire."

The NFU is concerned about occupiers whose livelihood will be at stake if land is taken away. It may be the crucial acreage without which a farm ceases to be viable. If that acreage is to be taken away because an

electricity supply company insists on building a power station when other alternatives are open to it, it is surely right that those alternatives should be examined. A power station project should not be presented at a compulsory purchase inquiry as inevitable and necessary, and as something which by its nature justifies the exercise of compulsory purchase powers. The director general will have the means, the experience and the qualifications to assess whether it might be open to the company to expand its capacity in another way.

The same procedure is envisaged in the amendment where there are public objections on the ground that the natural environment or wildlife would be damaged. Again, one can imagine a compulsory purchase inquiry where the objectors come along to point out that some unique wildlife habitat or noteworthy and well-appreciated environmental feature will be destroyed, but the supply company says, "We have to have this power station. It must be built. We have no alternative." In those circumstances, it is surely reasonable that instead of the inspector dealing with the matter at a compulsory purchase inquiry the director general, who will be qualified in those matters, should be able to consider whether the company could not carry out the expansion it required by some means other than the building of the plant in that particular place.

Amendment No. 176 also seeks to secure the rights available to objectors at planning inquiries in cases where compulsory purchase is involved.

The burden of both amendments is to protect the environment, wildlife and those whose livelihood may be affected by the exercise of draconian compulsory purchase powers by private companies which may not have sufficient regard to the alternatives open to them.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It falls to me to have to answer the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and, of course, the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). I shall deal first with the rather technical amendments referred to by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. We do not believe that those amendments are necessary, although we understand the hon. Gentleman's concern.

On amendment No. 176, where a proposed project requires the Secretary of State's consent under clauses 33 and 34, and is subject to public inquiry, the practice is for any related applications for compulsory purchase orders —the hon. Gentleman's worry—to be considered together with the planning application. In fact, the inspector will generally be asked to advise the Secretary of State on both matters. So there is no question of an application for a compulsory purchase order being allowed to affect the holding or the outcome of the inquiry.

We also think that amendment No. 175 is unnecessary because the compulsory purchase provisions of schedule 3 would apply only where the licensee wished to purchase land for licence-related activities, that is, activities directly related to the generation, transmission or supply of electricity. Under the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 a public inquiry has to be held if the owner-occupier of the land objects. The hon. Gentleman has fairly raised these matters, but they are covered under present legislation.

Mr. Beith: Is the Minister satisfied that, at such an inquiry, it would be open to the objector to argue that other options are available to the company, rather than building that particular plant in that place?

Mr. Spicer: The objector has rights to make whatever cases he wishes, and at the inquiry it will be up to the inspector to determine the terms of reference and the conditions. The objector's rights will be accommodated within the normal terms of an inquiry. Therefore, there is no problem for the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed to be concerned about.

I imagine that the hon. Member for Durham, North was speaking to amendment No. 165, which we do not want to accept because contractual procedures are fundamental to the new structure that we are introducing in the Bill. Contracts should be freely entered into with the least possible interference. The regulator will have powers over the price formula, but we do not wish to interfere with contractual arrangements after they have been set up.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 7

Amendments made: No. 5, in page 6, line 21 leave out from 'by' to 'and' in line 23 and insert 'other persons for such purposes as may be specified in the conditions'.

No. 6, in page 6, leave out lines 26 to 28.

No 7, in page 6, line 38, leave out

'by the Director such questions arising'

and insert

'or approval by the Director such questions arising or things falling to be done'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 3

COMPULSORY ACQUISITION OF LAND ETC. BY LICENCE HOLDERS

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move amendment No. 98, in page 72, line 15, leave out 'five years from' and insert

'the period of five years beginning with'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 92, 81 to 84, 93, 9 to 11, 94 to 96, 85, 86, 89, 29 and 30.

Mr. Lang: The amendments in this group are all minor, technical or intended to clarify—with the single exception of amendment No. 92, about which I shall say a few words.

Schedule 3 sets out the procedure by which one licensee may compulsorily purchase land belonging to another licensee. The procedure would, in particular, be available when an independent generator wishes to purchase redundant land, for example a disused power station site, belonging to National Power or PowerGen. The procedure would involve both the Director General of Electricity Supply and the Secretary of State. The director is required to refuse his consent to a CPO application if it appears to him that

(a) the land would be used for the purposes of an installation necessary for the carrying out of the activities which the existing owner is authorised by his licence to carry on; (b) the use will commence, or any necessary planning permission or consent will be applied for, within five years.

The compulsory purchase order then has to be confirmed by the Secretary of State.

Amendment No. 92 enables the Secretary of State, by order, to vary the five-year period that the director general

[Mr. Lang]

has to take into account. It introduces an element of flexibility and calms the anxieties expressed in Committee and I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister give us further assurances on this point. He referred to the problems that could arise when a would-be private independent generator wants to take over "redundant land"—that was his expression. Redundant plant, or land that is no longer required, is one thing, and we understand that it would be particularly attractive for a private generator to acquire access to such land. That sounds an innocent and fair procedure—on the surface. However, something else is lurking beneath the surface. In the redundant power station, or major switching station, site is the belly of the transmission system.

The new would-be private generator will receive two advantages if the director general chooses to favour him with the benefit of the Secretary of State's advice. He not only gets a site—that is the innocent part of it—he gets a site which has been planned for the integrated system, from which we in Britain benefit, which has all the grid lines running straight out of it.

Therefore, the private generator has the advantage of a site with a windfall of gains which removes the need to invest in a transmission network. To do that without specifying in the Bill that compensation will be paid to those who have invested in the power lines from that location, whether it is a major switching station or a power station, would be an abortion; an improper procedure contrary to the rights of the people who have invested a large amount of money. We need some assurance from the Minister on that.

Mr. Lang: I understand the anxieties of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). They are probably exaggerated and I shall seek to reassure him.

First, we are talking often about land which has not been developed in any way at all but which has been acquired with a view to possible development for a power station. In other cases we may be talking about redundant power station sites, possibly in an urban area, which might have value, not necessarily for electricity.

Mr. Morgan: The hon. Gentleman is getting to the nub of the argument. It is precisely those sites that are the most attractive to the new technology. We could quote examples from almost every large city in Britain. The technology in electricity generation has caused the siting requirements to come full circle. Power stations 30 or 40 years ago were 50 MW, 100 MW or 150 MW on average, all in large cities. Then with the explosion of turbine generator size they went straight up to 500 MW, 600 MW, and finally 660 MW, as one sees in giant stations such as Drax. They all had to be moved 30 or 40 miles from the cities to sources of cooling water such as the large rivers of the Trent, the Ouse or the Ayr.

Now, according to John Baker, the chief executive designate of National Power and PowerGen, the technology has come back to the 200 MW or even 150 MW power stations, which can produce electricity just as cheaply. Therefore, those redundant downtown power station sites are needed once again. Those are the attractive sites because the technology means that the plants can be small. This is where the fight will come.

The old power stations of the municipal era in the 1920s and 1930s were located precisely where everybody who is after the jam which will be made available on privatisation will want to go. This is an extremely hot potato in the technological, profitable and competitive future of the industry. Any suggestion that that can be slipped through as a technicality is a complete misconstruction of where the investment will take place.

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) was intervening in the Minister's speech. We cannot have an intervention on an intervention.

Mr. Lang: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Cryer: If my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) is making a valid point, as I think he is, is it not also true that the very sites that he is talking about are ideal for combined heat and power schemes operating in inner-city areas? Would it not be important to keep such sites as an alternative?

Mr. Lang: That may be so, but the point of the amendment is simply to vary the five-year period by replacing the words "five years from" with the words "the period of five years beginning with".

In devising the procedures in schedule 3 the Government have sought to establish a balance between, on the one hand, the good competition reasons for enabling independent generators to gain access to redundant power station sites and, on the other, the rights of the incumbent owner.

The Government believe that the schedule gets the balance right, but that the amendment would provide a reserve power that would enable the Government to reduce the five-year period in paragraph 2(2)*(b)* of schedule 3, if that should appear desirable on competition grounds, in order to facilitate access for independent generators to surplus land held by other licensees. It is a desirable element of flexibility and the balance is right.

Mr. Morgan: The question is whether the balance is right. Even the CEGB, before the cap-badging and the theoretical split took place on 1 January, was anxious about the future of gas turbine stations which it wanted to locate on many of its old redundant power station sites such as Colchester avenue in Cardiff. It thought that these were the right places for its booster stations, even with the old-fashioned technology, and with none of the impact of the splitting of the two power stations, or the additional encouragement for private generation. The board still wanted those sites to be reserved for gas turbines. What compensation will there be for the loss of that ability to put gas turbine stations in to act as local boosters at times of peak demand?

11.45 pm

Then there is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) made about CHP. Obviously, one cannot have CHP, on sites like Ratcliffe-on-Soar or Drax, a long way from stations. The middle of Slough or Cardiff or Bradford, where power stations that were built in the 1930s were knocked down in the 1960s, is where one finds the really attractive locations for water grids to go with electricity grids. Almost

invariably the switching stations are still there, conferring enormous benefit on the land. In addition, there are the housing and industrial estates that are to be supplied from the hot water grid. Whoever controls this land controls the industry.

We have heard the Minister of State boast about the 7 GW from potential private investors. He seemed to be waving some sort of macho symbol before the House, to indicate the great success of private generation, forgetting that half the time it was Labour-controlled city councils that were putting together the consortia which were going to have the more constructive and innovative schemes in areas like Leicester, Sheffield and Newcastle.

But they all need these sites. The whole point about this legislation is that we must be sure that the Minister, in his search to come good on the 7 GW of private power about which he has been talking—some of it might be described as Socialist private power, emanating from the innovative ambitions of Labour-controlled city councils, which, half the time, half of the rest of Ministers are trying to close down—realises that these sites are absolutely critical. Without the right site one does not have the potential for a profitable scheme.

I am concerned that private generators may, by back-door methods, gain preferential access to the Minister, who has been putting himself on the line by saying, "I am going to get private power in." When I say "private generators" I mean really private generators with just banks behind them, and not generators controlled by Labour local authorities—or even Conservative local authorities or hung councils—or British Coal, or other public-sector bodies. Private generators will want those sites, and they will get preferential access, because otherwise they will not go ahead, and if they do not go ahead the Secretary of State will not have much of a speech for the next Tory party conference.

Mr. Cryer: I can tell from the look on your face, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you are looking forward to my comments. No doubt you will be disappointed to learn they will be fairly brief.

Mr. Haynes: And in order.

Mr Cryer: And, of course, in order.

I, too, am concerned about the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has made. In the early 1980s I was closely involved in questioning the CEGB about the closure of a number of power stations on these sites. I recall, for instance, the one near the centre of Huddersfield and, many years earlier, the one at Canal road, Bradford—a plum site which has been sold for retail development. These are plum sites in every sense because they are near city centres. If the private sector, so beloved of the present collection of incompetents in the Government, acquires them for private generation, they will confer an enormous advantage, particularly if the private generators decide to opt out of generation and sell the sites for retail or industrial development.

I have always felt that city-centre sites should have been retained by the CEGB for electricity generation. I gave the reasons in that unfortunate—unfortunate, as it turned out—intervention in an intervention about combined heat and power. If the waste heat from electricity generation is to be used for heating domestic or industrial units, the generating will have to be done near those units. The sites about which we are talking are situated largely in inner-city areas.

I thought that the CEGB pursued a mistaken policy in concentrating on large power stations, with consequent extended transmission lines, and closing down relatively recently constructed—in some cases in the 1960s—power stations near city centre sites. My view was that the CEGB was creating a power gap to justify the construction of nuclear power stations—because that was surplus generating capacity and was not a basic component—when the small stations were adequate in total to meet the generation demand.

I hope that the Minister will give more concrete assurances that this is not an opportunity for the private enterprise cronies of Conservative Members to come into the industry and have direct access to city-centre sites, which are the most valuable, whether for generation or for making a fast buck, enabling them to get their hands on real estate which at present is publicly owned.

Mr. Lang: I can give the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) the assurance he seeks. He is reading more into the amendment than it provides. We debated this matter in Committee. I am proposing a minor modification to the provision that already exists in the schedule to enable the five-year period to be varied and thereby introduce a desirable degree of flexibility. We are talking about a situation in which the Secretary of State and the director general are involved and have a role to play. We are talking in the context of a compulsory purchase order. This is a desirable modification of the provision as drafted.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) raised the question of compensation. There are already compensation procedures in schedule 3. The standard situation when a compulsory purchase takes place is that compensation must be paid on the basis of market value without taking account of development value. That would apply here also.

I emphasise that under a Bill as drafted National Power or PowerGen will be able to forestall an attempt by another licensee to raise a compulsory purchase order against their redundant land by showing that they intended to use that land or expecting to apply for planning permission within five years. In our view, while that is a fair measure of protection for those companies, it is right that the Government should have the reserve power to vary the five-year period. That is what the amendment does, and I commend it to the House.

Mr. Morgan *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has a right to speak only once at this stage of the Bill.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 92, in page 72, line 16, at end insert—

'(2A) The Secretary of State may by order provide that sub-paragraph (2) above shall have effect as if for the period mentioned in paragraph (b) there were substituted such other period as may be specified in the order.'.

No. 8, in line 46, after first 'of', insert

', and paragraph 3 of Schedule 3 to,'.

No. 81, in page 74, line 37, after '15.', insert

'—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2) below,'.

No. 82, in line 41, at end insert—

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

'(2) Paragraph 10 of the first Schedule to that Act (statutory undertakers' land excluded from compulsory purchase) shall not apply where the land or rights in question belong to another licence holder.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 4

OTHER POWERS ETC. OF LICENCE HOLDERS

Amendments made: No. 83, in page 78, line 46, after 'in,', insert 'on,'.

No. 84, in page 79, line 11, leave out 'in' and insert 'on or over'.

No. 93, in page 82, line 48, at end insert—

'Provisions supplementary to paragraph 5

5A.—(1) Where a wayleave is granted to a licence holder under paragraph 5 above—

(a) the occupier of the land; and

(b) where the occupier is not also the owner of the land, the owner,

may recover from the licence holder compensation in respect of the grant.

(2) Where in the exercise of any right conferred by such a wayleave any damage is caused to land or to moveables, any person interested in the land or moveables may recover from the licence holder compensation in respect of that damage; and where in consequence of the exercise of such a right a person is disturbed in his enjoyment of any land or moveables he may recover from the licence holder compensation in respect of that disturbance.

(3) Compensation under this paragraph may be recovered as a lump sum or by periodical payments or partly in one way and partly in the other.

(4) Any question of disputed compensation under this paragraph shall be determined by the Tribunal; and sections 2 and 4 of the Land Compensation Act 1961 or sections 9 and 11 of the Land Compensation (Scotland) Act 1963 shall apply to any such determination.'.

No. 9, in page 83, line 39, at end insert

'or such longer period as the Secretary of State may specify'.

No. 10, in page 83, line 47, at end insert

'or such longer period as the Secretary of State may specify'.

No. 11, in page 84, line 30, after 'heard', insert

'by a person appointed by him'.

No. 94, in page 85, leave out lines 44 to 48.

No. 95, in page 86, line 2, at end insert—

'"moveables" means chattels in relation to England and Wales and corporeal moveables in relation to Scotland;'.

No. 96, in page 86, line 21, at end insert—

'"the Tribunal" means the Lands Tribunal in relation to England and Wales and the Lands Tribunal for Scotland in relation to Scotland.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 5

WATER RIGHTS FOR HYDRO-ELECTRIC GENERATING STATIONS IN SCOTLAND

Amendments made: No. 85, in page 87, line 3, after first 'of', insert 'riparian owners and other'.

No. 86, in page 87, line 43, after 'taken', insert

', or into which water is to be discharged'.

No. 89, in page 87, line 45, leave out from 'from' to 'and' and insert

'or into which water is to be so taken or discharged'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 15

DUTY TO SUPPLY ON REQUEST

Amendments made: No 12, in page 13, line 30, after third 'the', insert 'other person's'.

No. 13, in line 41, leave out from 'below' to end of line 43 and insert—

'(e) specify any other terms which that person will be required to accept under section (*Additional terms of supply*) below; and

(f) state the effect of section 21 below.'.

No. 14, in line 44, after 'to' insert

'19, (*Additional terms of supply*), 20 and'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 16

EXCEPTIONS FROM DUTY TO SUPPLY

Amendment made: No. 15, in page 14, line 13, at end insert

'and in this Part "private electricity supplier" means a person, other than a public electricity supplier, who is authorised by a licence or exemption to supply electricity'. —*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 19

POWER TO REQUIRE SECURITY

Amendment made: No. 16, in page 16, line 16, at end insert

'and any notice under paragraph (a) above shall state the effect of section 21 below.' —*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle (Lincoln): I beg to move, That further consideration of the Bill be now adjourned.

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There has been a welshing on an agreement about today's business, and I am totally disgusted with Conservative Members. *[Interruption.]* We had agreed to go to amendment No. 111 and we are not there yet. I know what the problem is. The Government cannot keep their troops here. We made agreements in Committee upstairs and we stuck to them. There has been no guillotine on the Bill, and now Government Members are welshing on an agreement at this stage of the measure. We should continue our debates up to amendment No. 111, yet now a Government Whip has moved, That further consideration of the Bill be now adjourned. It is shocking.

Mr. Wallace: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is fair to say that, as far as I am aware, the agreement has been honoured.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is exactly how we see it. It is outrageous for the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) to raise a point of order on this matter. We have abided by the agreement. The hon. Gentleman may be under some misapprehension. The Democrats also saw the agreement in that way and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) made that clear. We were willing to go further to meet the hon. Member for Ashfield but the Democrats were not prepared to do so. That is why we decided to honour the agreement that we had with the Democrats.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair is not aware of or party to any agreement.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 113, Noes 25.

Division No. 146] **[11.53 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*

Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Beith, A. J.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Kennedy, Charles
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Redwood, John
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Michael Fallon.

NOES

Barron, Kevin
Blair, Tony
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Foster, Derek
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Illsley, Eric
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Meale, Alan
Morgan, Rhodri
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Wareing, Robert N.
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered on Monday 10 April.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

SINGLE MEMBER PRIVATE LIMITED COMPANIES

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 6705/88 and the Supplementary Explanatory memorandum submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry on 10th March 1989 on single member private limited companies; and endorses the Government's view that if the collective decision of the European Community is that this proposal is to go forward, it should provide for only the minimum of regulation consistent with enabling such companies to be established and safeguarding the interests of those dealing with them.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Question agreed to.

CONTROL OF POLLUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL *[Money]*

Queens recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of that Act; and
(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

LAW OF PROPERTY (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Monday 10 April.

PETITIONS

Football Membership Scheme

12.9 am

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I beg leave to present a petition, the preamble of which states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble petition of supporters of Norwich City football club showeth that the undersigned signatories express their condemnation of proposed legislation to force football supporters to carry identification cards

We believe that a system of identity cards will have little impact on the problem of football related violence, will hinder football's attempts to attract a new generation of supporters and will lead to the eventual demise of the game as a spectator sport.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House urge that the Government bring forward proposals which have the support of genuine football supporters. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

Attached to that preamble are 10,916 signatures.

To lie upon the Table.

Planning Decisions (Claygate)

12.10 am

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I beg to ask leave to present a petition on behalf of 750 of my constituents. The signatures were collected over a few days after Easter, mainly from residents of the village of Claygate who are

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

concerned about the damage that planning decisions are causing to the character of their area. The problem concerns many of my constituents. The petition states

That the Council of the Borough of Elmbridge is at present unable to carry out the earnestly held wishes of the said residents that their environment be preserved from the demolition of certain residential properties of historic importance to them, and from the consequent loss of established trees and open spaces surrounding and between such properties, even when the Council is in agreement with the wishes of your petitioners. Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will enable them to continue in peace to enjoy the remaining buildings and open spaces, each in his own hamlet, village or town, by supporting the Private Member's Bill of the Hon. Member for Harrow, East . . . "Planning Permission (Demolition of Houses) Bill". This Bill would solve these problems.

I trust that the House will take due note of the views of the petitioners in this important matter.

To lie upon the Table.

Tonsillectomies (North Devon)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

12.12 am

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): In raising the subject of delays in tonsillectomy operations in north Devon I am talking of a drama which has no villains in the cast, although some members of it may regard their opponents as villainous.

Although there are no villains, there are victims, and they are children. They are children who need tonsillectomies, and they are children of my north Devon constituents who look for help to the North Devon health authority and, in particular, to our ear, nose and throat specialist, Mr. John Riddington Young. The problem, expressed simply, is that, although Mr. Riddington Young works within the National Health Service and within the North Devon health authority, for several years there has been a stalemate over the use of facilities in our excellent North Devon general hospital, where no tonsillectomies are being performed.

The stage is the hospital and the cast are the highly qualified, well-respected members of the health authority, the consultants, and all the medical and administrative staff within the authority. In essence, the problem is simply that, because of his fears for the safety of youngsters in their post-operative period, the ENT specialist refuses to use the post-operative facilities which the health authority wishes him to use.

Should the young patient be placed in the paediatric ward or in a surgical ward? On one side of the argument is the health authority, which considers that a paediatric ward is the right place for a youngster to recover. On the other side is the argument of the ear, nose and throat specialist, who will only accept placement of his patients in a surgical ward. He wants a physically separate ward or area in which patients may recover, free from fear of cross-contamination. Those are sensible and logical, but argumentative positions. I truthfully have no idea who is in the right.

Now an element of farce appears. The consultant will not operate under the conditions laid down by the health authority. Recently, the Government have provided £75,000 towards cutting the queues of people on waiting lists. I was grateful for that until I found out that, because the consultant will not operate until the health authority accepts his conditions for the children, the health authority, disagreeing with its consultant, is sending 40 children for tonsillectomies at Nuffield hospital in Plymouth. So out of our £75,000 of extra funds, £49,000 will be spent on sending our youngsters 50 or 60 miles to Plymouth for their operations. It seems ludicrous. We have the surgeon and we have the beds, but because the beds are in the wrong ward—or seem to be—we send our youngsters across the county and pay for the privilege of not using our own facilities. We have an outstanding surgeon and a super hospital and they are part of a good local health authority, but no operations are carried out. That waste of abilities and facilities must cause my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to reach with a shudder for his White Paper.

The problem goes back to 1984. I was first involved when one parent, who was a qualified nurse, complained about the lack of access to her child in the post-operative

period after a tonsillectomy and was in great dispute with Mr. Riddington Young. Time passed, and during 1987 there were rumblings of discontent over the growing list of young people needing tonsillectomies, but having either to go to Exeter—where, I believe, the post-operative system used is that preferred by Mr. Riddington Young—or to go private.

Constituents sought my help and I, in turn, contacted the community health council and the North Devon health authority. As nothing seemed able to break the stalemate, I sought help from the previous Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), but the stalemate continued. We are now into our fourth year of no tonsillectomies, although beds and a consultant are available. We reached the stage that the stalemate always seemed to be on the point of compromise, but whenever the usual channels were used they silted up so it was necessary to find a way over or round them. The purpose of this debate is to ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to use the national part of our National Health Service to effect or even impose a solution.

I want to make two further points. Mr. John Riddington Young has the reputation of being an outstanding ear, nose and throat specialist. His patients appreciate his work and many constituents have written to me in his support. He is from Yorkshire and has many of the talents of that great county and it may be that he also has some of the stubbornness for which it is also renowned. Compromise seems alien to him, as he believes that any compromise may damage his patients. Who can complain about a medical officer who cares more for his patients than for the bureaucracy? I have no specific complaint about the consultant.

Secondly, my North Devon health authority is excellent. In 10 years in the House, I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of complaints about the authority. I listen to colleagues in Question Time and debates complaining about their local health authorities, but I do not have that problem. My constituents like the health authority and they like its consultants. None the less, there are no operations and that is ludicrous. I have used the word "silly" in the past and been criticised for it, but it must be silly that the taxpayers' money is not being used to help the children who need help.

The North Devon health authority claims to be following Government guidelines in making the best use of the beds. Perhaps following the problems of Cleveland, it is unwilling to put young children in an adult ward overnight. The crux of the problem is that the consultant specialist says, "I will operate only if children are placed in a surgical adult ward overnight." However, he would prefer a separated ward and I understand his argument on that. The health authority says, "We have good paediatric staff, with excellent nurses with excellent qualifications, and the paediatric ward is where children should go." Both arguments carry complete conviction to the layman but taken together the two arguments mean that none of the children in my constituency are getting their tonsillectomies, which must be nonsense under any circumstances.

Therefore, I can see both points of view in the play. I do not use the word "play" humorously because this is a play. Although we are talking about operating theatres, the issue is theatre with a play that has a cast of excellent characters who are highly qualified people. They are people of whom I have no personal criticism because they are specialists in their own procedures. However, they are none the less at loggerheads and we have reached the stage where only my hon. Friend the Minister can assist us in making a breakthrough.

My fear is that if we do not resolve the problem soon my area, covered by the North Devon health authority, will lose its ENT operating capacity. Unusually, it is a single consultant facility. Children need to be near their parents, especially when they are in hospital and although Exeter is an excellent hospital it is 50 miles away and for a low-income constituency such as mine that is 50 expensive miles. That is my problem; the children should be near their parents; the parents live in the Barnstaple and the Ilfracombe area, which makes that the logical place for operations.

I turn finally to the White Paper of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health. It is not to the taste of many medical people and nor are some of my hon. Friends deeply enamoured by it. I believe in local health care and respect Mr. Riddington Young, the consultant, but equally I know well and have full confidence in councillor Mrs. Ro Day the chairman of the authority.

It may be that our regional health authority in far-away Bristol—we in the west country think of Bristol as south midlands, not south west—should have done something earlier. Perhaps the local consultants, individually or collectively, should have brought pressure to bear. But whatever the reason, only the children are suffering. No one else has lost a thing—not a penny, not a pound. No one has lost a night's sleep except for the parents—and the children have suffered. The community is sick and tired of what seems to us to be a dispute that should have been resolved long ago.

Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bring down the curtain on this too long running farce. The cast is excellent but it must get its act together because beyond the size and the scope of what is a petty dispute to the outside world is the whole question of our National Health Service. Some of my constituents were sent to Exeter last year for treatment for cancer and it is well known nationally that a number were badly damaged by an overdose. For what it is worth, constituents come to me and say, "We were promised help but we have not got it. There is some form of delay. There is a problem over legal aid."

While I am a supporter of the NHS—my family and myself are users of our National Health Service—none of us, ordinary laymen, doctors, nurses or consultants, can say that the Health Service is beyond criticism. It is too important for that. That is why I ask my good friend the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) to see what he can do to break this deadlock. We love and are proud of our Health Service, but sometimes it does not work and that is why, late at night like this, I must keep some of us in the House awake to try to help those who need help.

12.23 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) on his success in winning this opportunity to debate a matter of some concern to his constituents. He is recognised for his unflagging interest in the welfare of the people of his constituency and I pay particular tribute to him.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

These matters undeniably involve clinical judgment and it would not be right for me to pass judgment. However, I am concerned, as is my hon. Friend, about the consequences for the children.

I, like perhaps many other hon. Members, had my tonsils out when I was 10 in my local, excellent National Health Service hospital. It was local, and I appreciate what my hon. Friend has said about the need for young children, in particular, to be close to their families and to avoid, if possible, extensive travel.

Perhaps it would be appropriate for me to talk briefly about waiting lists, especially as they affect ear, nose and throat services.

The Government have been concerned in the past two years to tackle the problem of waiting lists and times for people waiting for treatment under the National Health Service. To this end, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has set aside considerable sums of money—£25 million in 1987-88, £30 million in the year just ended and £31 million in 1989-90—to enable health authorities to attack those areas and specialties where the number of people waiting, and the length of time they have to wait, is a problem. The money provided will enable more than 300,000 extra in-patients and day cases and over 200,000 extra out-patients to be treated by April 1990.

Looking at the picture more broadly, an impressive 6·5 million in-patients in all specialties are now being treated each year in our hospitals. This represents an increase of nearly one quarter over the past 10 years.

How does north Devon fit into this picture of expanding health care? Current expenditure has increased by over 30 per cent. in real terms since 1982-83. The proportion of frontline staff—doctors, nurses and other health professionals—has increased. Numbers of patients treated have risen correspondingly in the same period. The way in which statistics are collected has recently changed but between 1982 and 1986 in-patient cases rose by 26 per cent., out-patients by the same amount and day cases by 29 per cent.

I mention all this because it is important to see how far we have come in a short time, and what great strides have been made in access to health services for the population as a whole and for north Devon in particular. We do not rest on our laurels, however. We drive on. Problems remain, as this debate testifies, and it would be foolish to suppose that we could ever elininate them all, even if they could be anticipated.

There are various reasons for the build-up of waiting lists and times, where these occur at levels which begin to cause concern. They can often be resolved by changes in patient management, and by better informed referrals. In the south-west, general practitioners are sent information on waiting list numbers by specialty throughout the region on a quarterly basis. In other instances, it means specially targeted resources to help ease bottlenecks. Hence the existence of the waiting list fund.

The South Western region has received substantial sums with which to tackle its waiting list problems—£1·65 million in 1987-88, £1·9 million in 1988-89, and £1·55 million for 1989-90. The regional health authority has made £60,000 available to North Devon in 1988-89, and allocated a further £76,000 for the coming year, out of which, as my hon. Friend said, £49,000 is intended for a project in the ear, nose and throat specialty to tackle that particular problem. The project, which involves contracting with the Nuffield hospital, Plymouth, to take 40 patients and which will last from July to October, will aim to reduce the number of children awaiting removal of tonsils and adenoids. I would draw the attention of my hon. Friend to the fact that the operations on these children would have to be funded by the health authority from either the waiting list initiative or from the authority's allocation.

If the children were not operated on in Plymouth, using the funds available under the waiting list initiative, and if they were looked after in hospital in north Devon, resources would be needed for those operations, so it would not be true to say that we are wasting £49,000 by applying this remedy to the problem.

I wish to comment on one other point that my hon. Friend made. The national and regional policy is that children should be treated in designated children's wards by specially trained staff so as to safeguard both their physical and psychological well-being. I believe that that is an opinion that is generally held, although, I admit, not universally agreed.

My hon. Friend will be aware of some of the background to the rise in the waiting list figures for ear, nose and throat operations in north Devon, about half of which are performed on children. Matters of clinical judgment were involved, which it is not appropriate to go into here, but about which I understand discussions have been taking place between the health authority and the consultant concerned, with independent expert advice. The health authority is optimistic that matters will soon be resolved. I understand that from 10 April Mr. Riddington Young has agreed to operate on children requiring the removal of tonsils and adenoids who are over the age of 10 years. That is recent and good news.

The matter is clearly one for the North Devon health authority to deal with, in consultation with the regional health authority, who hold the consultant's contract of employment. On that point, we have always believed that the level where the contract is held is less important than the actual management of the contract. We would expect the regional and district health authorities to work together in the day-to-day management of consultants and for local managers to deal with problems that arise. As my hon. Friend said, the proposals in the recent White Paper will strengthen those arrangements.

However, even after that recent and welcome news concerning the consultant involved, I appreciate that there may still be a problem to be resolved. I can tell my hon. Friend that I will ask Sir Vernon Seccombe, chairman of the South Western regional health authority, to report to me within one month from today on how the position has developed and on the extent to which it has been resolved. I can give my hon. Friend an assurance, which I hope he will convey to his constituents—especially to the parents of the children involved—that I place great importance on what he has said and that I will write to him at the end of one month.

My hon. Friend raised the altogether separate subject of compensation payments for patients who received radiation overdoses at the Royal Devon and Exeter hospital last year. That matter is being handled by the legal advisers of Exeter health authority and the patients concerned or their executors. As my hon. Friend knows,

the health authority has, following an independent inquiry, accepted that it had failed in its duty and it has already paid out interim sums. It is working with its legal advisers to effect satisfactory final settlements as quickly as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 7 April 1989

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Football Membership Scheme

9.34 am

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I wish to present, under Standing Orders Nos. 132 to 136, a petition, which carries 26,411 names. The petition was organised by the supporters of Liverpool football club and by members of the Football Supporters Association in the area. It was handed to me at Anfield, the Liverpool football club ground, at half time on the occasion of the Liverpool versus Derby County league match, which was attended by 40,000 people.

The petition says:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland assembled. The Humble Petition of supporters of Liverpool Football Club and members of the Football Supporters Association sheweth.

That we condemn the proposed legislation to force football supporters to carry identification cards, and we believe that a system of identity cards will have little impact on the problem of football-related violence, will hinder football's attempt to attract a new generation of supporters and will lead to the eventual demise of the game as a spectator sport.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Government to bring forward proposals which have the support of genuine football supporters.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Points of Order

9.36 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you will be aware, points of order were raised at the end of business questions yesterday. I have two related points of order which are strictly procedural. In reply to a question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), the Leader of the House said:

"nothing new has emerged in recent times."—[*Official Report*, 6 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 364.]

He was referring, of course, to Sir Leon Brittan's broadcast and matters relating to the Westland affair three years ago.

As I understand it, the submission of oral questions or questions for written answer that relate to historic matters is sometimes not possible. I do not share the view of some that the procedures of the House are arcane, traditional and obstructive. On the contrary, I believe that, if properly followed, they can be used to call the Executive to account, although only on reasonably current matters.

May I confirm with you, Mr. Speaker, that it would be possible for the Leader of the House, if he so wished, to specify where a record of the approval of two gentlemen in the Prime Minister's Office was recorded—in debates at the time or in reports of Select Committees? I have tabled a written question—written question No. 139—and although I shall not push the right hon. Gentleman on it now, may I confirm with you, Mr. Speaker, that it would be open for him to reply to it now if he so wished? If he does not, no doubt he will answer the question fully in writing on Monday, with his customary courtesy.

My second point of order is related to my first. The position is now related to what Sir Leon Brittan and others may already have said in trailers to the broadcast. I understand, however, that there is to be a further broadcast tonight, and either Sir Leon, or others concerned in the matter, may say other things which, prima facie, are in conflict with, or additional to, the evidence given to the Select Committee on Defence or speeches or other documents that are considered official. In that case, Mr. Speaker, may I confirm that the scope for the submission of questions to the Table or to you yourself in written form is related to any apparent discrepancy that may arise and that they will therefore be in order and those matters will cease to be historic?

That is the position as I understand it, but, in view of the intense interest in this matter on both sides of the House and among the media, and as it might be thought that the procedures of the House are obstructive rather than permissive, I thought that it might be helpful to get your ruling on these matters.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for putting his point of order in that way. His first question was not really to me but to the Leader of the House. I am sure that the Leader of the House will answer in whatever way he feels appropriate.

As to the second question, the programme has yet to be seen, so the matter is hypothetical at the moment. I have noted what the hon. Member has said. I have mentioned to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) that I have a constituency surgery tonight, so I

[Mr. Speaker]

shall not be able to watch the programme, but personally I will ensure that it is carefully watched by those who advise me.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As the Leader of the House is present, it might be helpful if he would respond now; it would save time at 11 o'clock. Yesterday, he categorically told my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees):

"If the right hon. Gentleman is interested in names he should look at the Select Committee's report".—[*Official Report*, 6 April 1989; Vol. 150, c. 359.]

Yesterday, he was specifically asked twice whether he would say where that information was available. In view of the broadcast which we all know is to take place tonight and which we have seen trailed, it is clear that there will be great speculation over the weekend. Perhaps the Leader of the House could defuse it for the Prime Minister and avoid aggravation for her next week, which I am sure is his greatest wish, by giving us the information today, instead of forcing us to take further action next week.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will think about the matter between now and 11 o'clock and consult his notes. He said yesterday that he had read all the proceedings to refresh his memory. As his memory is probably the freshest of all, perhaps he will look at them again between now and 11 o'clock and give us clarification at 11 o'clock.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. What is not hypothetical is that the most senior appointee that this country has in Europe, the Vice-President of the Commission, has already gone on record many times on television in the past two days saying that two of the most intimate and powerful civil servants of the Prime Minister have indulged in something that they should not have done. They gave approval to something which they knew was wrong. It does the House of Commons no credit whatsoever for the Leader of the House to sit in the House relaxed and laughing at the serious points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing).

I sat and listened, as did some of my colleagues, to Lord Armstrong of Ilminster on that memorable occasion when he gave evidence to the Select Committee on Defence. Yesterday, the Leader of the House said to my right hon. Friend for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) at column 359, to myself at column 361 of *Hansard*, and later to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) that nothing had changed. The Armstrong inquiry was based on differences in understanding between No. 10 and the Department of Trade and Industry. What the Leader of the House says is a travesty——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a matter for debate, not a point of order. I cannot be held responsible for what the Leader of the House said. I have heard nothing out of order so far. The hon. Gentleman is now seeking to pre-empt a programme which some of us are looking forward to seeing this evening. It would be more appropriate for him to see that programme and then, if there is anything in his point of order, pursue it again on Monday, but not today.

Mr. Dalyell: The key statement has been made and trailed many times. We are expected to believe that four highly trained civil servants—Mr. Mogg, Miss Bowe, Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell—had a double misunderstanding on the same subject. That is what the Select Committee was asked to believe. Some hon. Members have gone to the trouble of checking with members of that Select Committee. That is exactly the impression that they had. Lord Armstrong should be——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a private Members' day. It is not appropriate for the hon. Member to raise these matters now because there is nothing that I can do about them. They are matters of concern that the hon. Gentleman has with the Government. They are not points of order for the Chair.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Dalyell: The point of order is that the reputation of the House of Commons is at stake. If the Leader of the House thinks that it is all right for senior civil servants to leak a Law Officer's letter—because that was the implication——

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member had a private Member's Bill, he would be concerned if points of order of this kind were being raised during private Members' time. This is not an appropriate moment to raise it. If it is a point of order which I can answer, I will gladly do so, but I have heard nothing so far that has the remotest concern for me as Speaker.

Mr. Dalyell: If I had a private Member's Bill, whether I were an Opposition Member or a Conservative Member, I should be concerned that the leaders of my party and the leaders of the British Government thought that it was all right for Mr. Powell and Mr. Ingham, on their own admission, to leak a Law Officer's——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is kicking in his own goal. It is not a point of order for me. He keeps on saying that it is a matter for the Government. It is a matter for the Government, not for me. It is not a point of order.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would like clarification. Can you confirm that it is your ruling that you are not responsible for the contents of Ministers' speeches in this House? In view of what you said a few moments ago, will you further confirm that points of order cannot be based on what is heard on television? If television programmes are to be the basis, not for debate but for points of order, we shall be here for ever.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is possible that new facts could emerge. None of us has seen the programme yet.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. One thing is pretty certain, and that is that you would do well, even though you have your surgery tonight, to get the video working and make sure that the programme is recorded. It is clear that one matter of order that concerns you is that you need to be abreast

of events. In this ever-changing period, relating in particular to the long-standing Westland affair, it would be as well for you to be fully aware of what is happening.

If it so happens that two non-elected people such as Bernard Ingham and Charles Powell are involved and now, it is said, an ex-Member of this House, Leon Brittan, who is on £97,000 a year and in relative safety, economically speaking, has made statements which he seemingly was unable to make when he was a Member of the House, it means that the matter is changing. In view of the fact that you must occupy the Chair for a considerable time, it is necessary for you to be able to conduct the proceedings in such a way as to be able to take account of all matters as they affect Opposition and Conservative Back Benchers.

The Leader of the House is here; he has made himself available. I suggest that he should make himself even more available and go to the Dispatch Box and tell us what he intends to do. It will be a problem for you, Mr. Speaker, as this sad, sorry story unfolds over the next few days and months.

One thing is certain. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) stands taller today than he did when he raised this matter against a background of hostility from many parts of the House. As the story unfolds, and as Leon Brittan starts to reveal the truth, Mr. Speaker, you may have to take account of many points of order arising out of what is happening against this sorry background.

Mr. Speaker: I fear that that may well be so, and I shall prepare myself. I am not very good at operating the video, so if the hon. Gentleman could act as a back-up for me, that would be helpful.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No further point of order can arise on this matter.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Please sit down. We have all admired the hon. Gentleman's perseverance, but I do not think that it is a matter for today. We must now move on——

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: It is not a matter for today.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot add further to what I have said, but if it is a new point of order, I shall have to hear it.

Mr. Dalyell: What is at stake is the great traditions of the British civil servants. It is absolutely corrupt that two civil servants positively approved a leak and disclosure of a Law Officer's letter. It is absolutely and totally corrupt and wrong, yet here they remain——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a speech that the hon. Gentleman might have an opportunity of making at another time, but not on a point of order.

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No, I am not hearing any more today——

Mr. Dalyell *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No. I must ask the hon. Gentleman not to prejudice his chances on Monday——

Mr. Dalyell: There is nothing more important than the integrity of this House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I order the hon. Gentleman to resume his seat.

Mr. Dalyell: There is nothing more important——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I warn the hon. Member that I shall have to take further action, and I would be reluctant to do that.

BILL PRESENTED

Dock Work

Mr. Secretary Fowler, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Channon, Mr. Tony Newton, Mr. John Cope and Mr. Patrick Nicholls, presented a Bill to abolish the Dock Workers Employment Scheme 1967 and repeal the Dock Workers (Regulation of Employment) Act 1946; to make provision for the dissolution of the National Dock Labour Board; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 10 April and to be printed. [Bill 113.]

Orders of the Day

Parking Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

AMENDMENT OF ROAD TRAFFIC ACT 1984 (NO. 1)

'S.45 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 shall be amended as follows:—

After sub-section (5) insert a new sub-section:

"No Local Authority may issue an order under sub-section (1) which designates any parking place on a highway for use by buses or coaches capable of carrying more than twelve passengers.".'.—*[Mr. Maples.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

9.52 am

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may also discuss the following:

New Clause 3—*Amendment of Road Traffic Act 1984 (No. 3)*—

'S.45 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 shall be amended as follows:—

After sub-section (7) insert a new sub-section:

"Where any designated Residents Parking Scheme is in operation the relevant local authority may refuse to issue Residents' permits in respect of vehicles other than cars.".'.

New clause 4—*Amendment of Road Traffic Act 1984 (No. 4)*—

'S.45 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 add a new clause:—

"Where parking in a public street is considered to seriously restrict the flow of traffic, the relevant Local Authority may make orders prohibiting parking for the purpose of commercial deliveries at specified times.".'.

New clause 5—*Amendment of Road Traffic Act 1984 (No. 5)*—

'S.42 Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 shall be amended by adding a new sub-section (5):—

"(5) Local Authority shall provide off-street parking facilities for buses and coaches.".'.

New clause 7—*Coach parking places*—

'The following section shall be inserted after section 63—

"*Coach parking places*

63A.—(1) Any parking place within the meaning of this part of this act may be designated as a coach parking place, after consultation between the local authority and the police, and it shall be an offence to park a coach otherwise than at a place so designated.

(2) Any offence under this section shall be punishable by a fine on level 5 of the standard scale and by the forfeiture of the vehicle's licence for such period as a court may determine or by both such fine and such forfeiture.".'.

Mr. Maples: It is a long time since I spoke in the House on a Friday morning. In fact, I think that the last time was when I made my maiden speech. Friday morning is a good time to make a maiden speech because one can have a good lunch afterwards rather than skipping lunch before.

As I was coming here this morning, I could not help reflecting that while Mr. Gorbachev will, I expect, be addressing the world in his Guildhall speech in an hour or so, the House of Commons has chosen to debate parking. I suppose that there are cavillers who would say that that is appropriate for the role that the House of Commons has chosen for itself, but I choose to believe that there are days on which those roles will be reversed, when we shall be discussing international events and world statesmen will discuss parking.

Although parking is a mundane problem, it is far from being unimportant. It is intimately tied up with many of the transport problems that many cities and especially London face.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on getting his Bill this far. I suspect that this must be the fastest time on record for getting a Bill to Report. He had a formal Second Reading and an uncontroversial hour and a quarter in Committee. Perhaps he expected to get his Third Reading by 10 o'clock. I am sorry to disappoint him on that, but this is a serious matter and other matters should be considered with it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East described the Bill in Committee as a modest measure. I suspect that his reluctance to incorporate more controversial provisions in it may have had something to do with the timetable with which he was faced, but nevertheless those matters should be discussed. As I said, my hon. Friend is to be congratulated on having got his Bill this far this quickly. To get a Bill to Report with an hour and a quarter of debate is pretty good. Perhaps the Government should have put my hon. Friend in charge of the Water Bill—it might have taken rather less than the 200 hours that it has taken.

The Parking Bill allows for charging by non-cash means in local authority car parks. That is obviously a laudable objective and I am amazed that primary legislation is needed to achieve it. I understand that a similar Bill was introduced a couple of years ago which did the same for on-street parking although I have not noticed the benefits of that in practice. Perhaps that is one of the few instances where technology has not caught up with Parliament, rather than the other way round.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic said in Committee that this is a Benthamite Bill in that there are no losers, only gainers. While that may be true in respect of the limited effect of the Bill, it is certainly not true of parking in general. It is worth spending a little time looking at the problem of parking in the context of transport policy as a whole and that is the end to which my new clauses are directed.

I shall speak primarily about London because it is the area that I know best and I have a London constituency. I suspect that without being unduly parochial it is true to say that London is where most of the problems are at their most obvious. We clearly have problems with commuter transport by train into London, with the Tube and buses and, of course, with cars getting around London.

My hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues in the Department of Transport have produced some interesting studies recently. There has been the central London rail study and the Department's statement on transport plans for London. I believe that the Department is soon to produce an east London rail study, which will be of considerable interest to myself and my constituents in Lewisham. I understand also that it is in the process of conducting four London assessment studies, and two others, one on the Heathrow area and one on the western environmental improvement route. One of those is extremely relevant to Lewisham as it concerns part of the

south circular road which goes through the constituency. London Regional Transport is also engaged on a fairly major programme to improve the Tube.

The relevance of parking is recognised in the "Transport in London" statement issued by the Department of Transport. The section on London's roads states:

"Increasing the capacity of the road network means making better use of existing roads—dealing with bottlenecks caused by narrow stretches of road or awkward junctions, using new technology to improve the flow of traffic, and tackling the problems caused by anti-social parking."

That last point is crucial. The report then discusses parking in rather more detail, stating:

"Sensible parking policies can make a significant contribution to tackling the problem of congestion. A single badly parked vehicle can halve the capacity of a road junction, reduce a dual carriageway to a single lane, or even block a road completely. London, particularly central London, cannot afford to see scarce road space squandered in this way . . . There is more to sensible parking policies than enforcing the law. It is also important to make the right provision of parking facilities. . . . There is seldom a case for subsidising parking".

That passage put the relevance of parking rather well. If one looks at the transport problems that London faces, one finds that parking is relevant to many of them.

I suspect that the major problem is commuter traffic coming into London. We should encourage the use of public transport and discourage the use of cars. To some extent we are seeing that trend established; commuting into central London by car accounts for only 170,000 journeys on the average day, whereas rail transport accounts for 390,000 and the Underground for 340,000. The percentage of commuters coming into London by rail and Underground has risen while the use of other modes of transport—primarily cars—has fallen. However, although we are starting to see that trend, we need to reinforce it. Many of us who use London's roads during the rush hour are fully aware of the problems and of the fact that reinforcing the trend towards the use of public transport is important.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): My hon. Friend read out some statistics about the ways in which people make their journeys into work in the capital. Will he remind the House of the date on which those statistics were compiled? How confident is he that those statistics are more accurate than the statistics that we receive relating to, for example, the balance of trade? The Chancellor told the House yesterday that those figures were subject to a dramatic margin of error. What is the margin of error in my hon. Friend's figures?

Mr. Maples: I have, unfortunately, no reason to say that the statistics are more accurate. However, I am sure that, if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer were put in charge of those too, we could rely on their accuracy to a far greater extent.

The first statistic on modes of travel into central London is eight years out of date. I imagine that it is the most recent or the Department would not have used it. The second figure, on the percentage of people coming in and out of London, was a trend from 1982 to 1987. I believe that that firmly shows that the proportion using British Rail has risen from 38 to 40 per cent., and the proportion using the Underground has risen from 28 to 36 per cent. The use of other modes of transport has fallen from 33 to 24 per cent. The more up-to-date statistic, in fact, reflects the same trend.

10 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I confirm the source that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) has given for the statistics, but my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) has raised an interesting point. Perhaps I could advertise that the Bottomley cup has still not been claimed. It is available to any academic, journalist or politician who in 1982 gave anything like a reasonably accurate forecast of how the use of the different modes of transport in London would change between 1982 and 1987. The facts are now available and are reasonably accepted, give or take the Chancellor's influence on them. Although the advertisement has been out in the open for months, so far no politician, academic or journalist has claimed the prize. Therefore, the cup is tarnished. If my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne could show that he made a reasonably accurate prediction in 1982, he may be the first person to be considered for the cup.

Mr. Maples: I believe that my hon. Friend can safely extend the offer of his award into other areas of academic endeavour, because academics have made wrong forecasts on a greater range of matters, not least of which was the performance of the economy. I seem to remember that 365 academics wrote to *The Times* saying that the British economy would never grow on the policies that the Government were expounding. We then proceeded to enter eight years of continuous and regular growth. I should have thought that my hon. Friend could extend his offer much more widely without any risk of being parted from his bottle of champagne.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): As my hon. Friend has rightly drawn our attention to the problems of London's traffic relating to road and rail commuting, will he contemplate the following two points? London Regional Transport and British Rail are required to supply their own police forces, while the taxpayers and the ratepayers of London, and, indeed, the rest of the country, pay for policing.

I received a letter only yesterday from the Secretary of State for Transport that indicated that the Department estimates that a mere 7 per cent. of police time is spent on road traffic matters. Will my hon. Friend agree that in London, with its traffic and parking problems, it would be hard to find any policeman who spends only 7 per cent. of his day dealing with matters related to the internal combustion engine?

Secondly, will my hon. Friend contemplate the proposition that British Rail's Snow Hill tunnel that takes commuters through London from north to south cost £1 million, while the M25, primarily designed for stockbroker belt commuters in the rush hour, cost us £2 billion and will cost an indefinite sum for an indefinite future?

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend has made some good points which he will no doubt develop later. In defence of motorists I would say that I believe that they pay far more in taxation through the road fund licence and tax on petrol than they get back in terms of roads.

My hon. Friend made an interesting point about the fact that roads are publicly financed—we accept that—and

[Mr. Maples]

that for other modes of transport we look to the user of the facility to pay more directly. That poses an interesting question. I believe that there are cases where public transport investment warrants a public contribution over and above what the users pay, because it takes pressure off public expenditure in other areas.

We should reinforce the trend of discouraging commuters coming into London by car. We appear to have various items built into our system that encourage people to use cars. One is the provision of cars as a fairly standard part of many people's employment; considerable tax advantage accrues from that. I am glad that in the last two Budgets the Chancellor has begun to remove that advantage by making that car benefit subject to a much fuller tax charge. However, there is still a long way to go.

On the other side of the question, many employers complain that they must provide cars for employees when they would much rather pay them the money to buy their own cars. The sooner we ensure that the car benefit is fully taxed, the less people will be encouraged to use their cars to get to work.

There is also the question of the provision of parking spaces for people when they get to work. I know that that is a touchy subject for us, because we have parking spaces provided. I believe that we can—perhaps not entirely objectively—claim that we are a special case. We are often kept here late at night by the likes of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), when most of us on the Government side would be happy to go home by Tube at 6 o'clock. I believe that the provision of parking spaces in such places as the City and the west end as part of a person's employment package encourages commuting by car, as do meters and car parks.

There are things that we can do to encourage commuters not to use their cars to go to work.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As it is a question of trying to set examples, would it not be better, for instance, if the Prime Minister—whom the hon. Gentleman knows better than I do—were to use British Rail? I know that she has to gallivant about in one of those posh cars provided by the taxpayer. Yesterday I think she was in a Zil and making herself available to Gorbachev, in the well-chosen words of the Leader of the House. If the right hon. Lady were to use British Rail more often—I do not think she has used it since she has been Prime Minister——

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend has used it once.

Mr. Skinner: The Minister says that she has used it once. If she were to use British Rail a little more often, that would set an example to others. As the hon. Gentleman's argument will be that he believes in not restricting people to any great degree and he would like to stop London and the other large cities being congested, would it not be a good idea if she were to use public transport more often? Perhaps the Chancellor of the Exchequer will also make some necessary changes. Why is it, for instance, that Ministers can have all these cars just waiting for them day in and day out? Every hour, one sees the place here full of chauffeurs waiting to drive Ministers from one oak-panelled study to the next. If we want to set examples, let us start from the top.

Mr. Maples: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to talk to his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who I believe has a car and driver provided at Government expense, and encourage him to set that example and start a trend. I suspect that the problem looks slightly different from the Ministers' point of view, as all things do when they affect personally. For some Ministers there will be the problem of security. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, that whenever I have to go to Birmingham, Sheffield or anywhere to which there is an Inter-City service, it is much more convenient to take the train than to drive. It is a much more pleasant journey, one can read the newspaper or work and one arrives in a reasonable frame of mind rather than being frazzled. The hon. Gentleman is right that travel by train is to be encouraged.

Another problem in London is through traffic. We really want to keep it out of London altogether. That is what the M25 is for and what I believe the east river crossing will help. *[Interruption.]* The M25 must be helpful. I do not know exactly what the statistical evidence is, but it is difficult to believe that all the traffic on the M25 was generated by the motorway. It must be helping through-London traffic. If it is not helping, we should perhaps expand it or double-deck it. We are building a new east river crossing presumably to contribute to solving the problem of keeping through traffic out of London.

The new rail links that are suggested from east to west and north to south in the central London rail study will probably help, because people will no longer need to use surface transport to get from Paddington to Liverpool Street. The Department of Transport has recently let it be known that it is looking at other methods of linking up motorways and major roads outside London in an effort to ease congestion on the M25.

We need to get out of London all road traffic that does not need to be in London. Through traffic should never be in inner London.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is not the reality that we are inevitably coming inexorably closer to having restrictions of one kind or another on private motor vehicles in city centres? That, therefore, should transcend the political spectrum and not be regarded as an anathema to Conservative Members. Be they electronic devices, number plate systems, day allocation systems, or the various experiments in Italian cities, restrictions are inevitable, especially when one considers how many passengers can be carried by two double-decker buses in comparison with private cars with only one driver in each. That is an absurd situation and we must grasp the nettle.

Mr. Maples: My hon. Friend may be right and certainly some of the experiments in Italian cities have been interesting. Although the concept of road pricing and electronic devices on cars may be intellecutally attractive to my hon. Friends, if not to others, it is fraught with political difficulties. I would prefer that the solutions did not involve telling people that they cannot use their cars in central London. We must strive to make it more convenient for them to use other modes of transport and leave it to them to make the choice.

If we adopted the measures proposed by my hon. Friend we would first need to ensure that we expanded the alternative means of transport available. We would need more park and ride facilities and a better commuter service on Network SouthEast, and the cross-London links

envisaged by the central London rail study would need to have been built. I hope that further expansion will also be suggested by the east London rail study.

The third problem relates to intra-traffic, which starts and ends its journey within London. Such vehicles are used for commercial purposes and for pleasure. Essentially that traffic is local, whether on road, rail or bus. The London roads should serve such traffic, which represents a great deal of the traffic in London.

The Department of Transport publication "Transport in London" states—I am sorry to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) that there is no date on the statistics—that 67 per cent. of the traffic entering and leaving central London are private cars; 76 per cent. of the vehicles entering and leaving inner London are private cars and 79 per cent. of the vehicles entering and leaving outer London are private cars. Therefore it is logical to assume that the vast majority of intra-London traffic is represented by private cars. For those drivers there is often no ready alternative means of transport. Most of our rail links are radial and although buses represent a viable alternative, trains do not.

The problems have been brought home to me in my constituency through which the south circular road passes. The majority of traffic on that road is local; most journeys start and end in south London. We could improve the journey times on the south circular by upgrading the road. An enormous amount of congestion could be relieved if it were turned into something similar to the north circular. The same people who would gain the advantage, however, would suffer the environmental penalty of having a four-lane highway driven through their neighbourhood.

Intra-London traffic represents a local problem and the solutions should suit local people. Where the majority of traffic on a road is local, the solution lies in considering the local difficulties rather than the commuting difficulties in general. The inescapable conclusion is that roads create traffic. That conclusion is mirrored in the "Transport in London" publication which states:

> "It is simply not possible to provide sufficient road capacity to handle every journey that could be made to or within central London. Indeed, it seems clear that there is already 'suppressed demand' for transport by car into central London . . . There is no point in building new roads into central and inner London if their main effect would be to cause commuters to switch from road to rail . . . the Government has consistently stressed that it does not see a case for driving major new roads into central London."

There is a great deal of evidence to support that argument. If we provide more roads or more parking we are likely to produce more commuters and more through-London traffic. If we built more roads we would be in serious danger of ruining London—we have already seen that happen in other cities. The motorways that have been driven through the centre of Birmingham have considerably detracted from that city's attractiveness. For a time I lived in Boston in the United States, which is a lovely old city with some neighbourhoods of great architectural beauty. That city is bisected by two huge motorways, the south-east expressway and the Massachussets turnpike. Those motorways have created a Berlin wall between sectors of the city. We must not let that happen to our cities, particularly to central London. The environmental price for such a road network is not worth it.

We will probably never provide enough road space to satisfy the existing suppressed demand.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I must leave the Chamber for a short time but before I do, will the hon. Gentleman consider the problem of parking larger vehicles, such as buses and coaches, which bring young people to London to see the House of Commons, Westminster Abbey and the other surrounding historic places? Those young people may come from Liverpool, Birmingham or wherever, and such coach trips are often the only way they can afford to visit London. I do not disagree with most of the hon. Gentleman's arguments, but how does he intend to deal with the parking problems of coaches and buses? Will barriers be erected so that youngsters will be unable to visit the House of Commons? Will there be no place for those vehicles to park? The new clause says that no parking facilities will be provided for coaches or buses:

> "carrying more than twelve passengers"

That is absurd. There are problems, but the solutions should not be nonsensical.

I encourage young people to visit the House of Commons and I like them to know about the democratic process and about our history. If the parking of coaches and buses is restricted, young people will be discouraged from visiting this place. Much of what the hon. Gentleman has said is sensible, but he should consider alternatives to new clause 1.

10.15 am

Mr. Maples: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but perhaps he has not paid as much attention to new clause 5 as he has to new clause 1. New clause 5 states that a

> "Local Authority shall provide off-street parking facilities for buses and coaches."

Anyone who travels along the Embankment will know that about 30 per cent. of it is used as a car park for buses and coaches, which is an incredibly uneconomic use of such scarce and valuable road space. Far more people can be carried in a bus—they use less road space than private cars—and it is important that off-street parking is provided. We should encourage the use of buses and coaches as they utilise the roads much better than cars.

I do not want major new highways driven through the centre of our cities, particularly London. We need to reduce the amount of traffic on our roads and make better use of them. The provision of parking space and more sensible parking regulations will help to achieve that goal. It is important to provide alternative means of transport before we start thinking about banning people from using their cars or imposing special pricing to restrict the use of private cars in central London.

A great deal of investment is needed in all forms of public transport—rail and Tube transport are obvious candidates for such necessary investment. Primarily the users should be asked to pay. The financial trade-off to the average commuter would be extremely good. If one's return journey by car is 50 miles a day that costs nearly £4,000 a year, one's employer may pay part of that cost because the car may be provided on a tax break as part of the employment package. The average season ticket to cover that distance costs nothing like that sum. The trade-off for people using private cars would be enough for them to finance at least part of the new investment needed for public transport development. They would pay less to travel, but the revenue accruing to the public transport

[Mr. Maples]

systems would increase and might be sufficient to finance a large part of the extra necessary investment in public transport development.

It is also important that the taxpayer rather than the user also finances investment. We are all affected by the pollution that extra traffic on the roads creates. I am aware of the damage done to neighbourhoods by enormous amounts of traffic. The south circular road damages the environment of those who live close to it and also creates rat-runs through neighbouring residential streets. Public investment in public transport will also mean that it is not necessary to provide so much public investment in roads, and there will be a trade-off there.

There are three factors: the environment, the resistance to traffic taking over residential neighbourhoods and obviating the need for increased investment in roads. Those are three reasons why public investment can properly be made and economically justified in public transport. I agree that, generally, users should pay—the trade-off for the commuter is extremely advantageous.

How can we make better use of existing roads? The answer is parking. Selfish and inadequate parking or parking at inappropriate times can, as the Department of Transport's publication pointed out, reduce four-lane roads to two, and two lanes to one—this always seems to be in the rush hour. I drive to work and am therefore partly guilty but I use the Tube for many of my journeys once I have arrived in London. My drive takes me down one of London's main streets which is normally a six-lane highway but is nearly always reduced to four because vehicles are parked on each side of it. It does not need many cars to block a complete lane of the road through Knightsbridge in the morning—one mail van on one side and a car inconsiderately parked on the other reduces the six-lane road to four lanes and reduces the volume of traffic on that road by one third.

Police and traffic wardens should pay more attention to this problem in the rush hour because better use of existing roads could be made if there were tougher parking regulations and enforcement. My hon. Friend the Minister should consider the point made in one of my new clauses about deliveries. The introduction of a three yellow line offence should be considered. That would be parking on three yellow lines at particular times, notably the morning and evening rush hours. The fines incurred should not be £5 and £10 but should be serious penalties because the costs of the motorist's inconsiderate parking are far in excess of the benefits that he will accrue from delivering or parking at his convenience. The cost of reducing the capacity of major roads by one third or a half is greater than the cost incurred by those who park inconveniently, and that will never be compensated by £10 or £20 fines, as we know from our own experience.

I used to find that the £4 or £5 penalty for leaving my car on the meter for too long in the West End or the City was cheap—probably cheaper than leaving my car in the NCP car park. When the penalty was increased and meant that my car was towed away, causing inevitable inconvenience and costing me £50 to retrieve, or when it was clamped, which was more inconvenient and cost slightly less—£20 or £30 to retrieve—I stopped doing it. I suspect that most people make a cost-benefit analysis of the risks of illegally parking. We need severe penalties to stop inconsiderate and selfish parking in the rush hour on main roads. Such penalties might include losing one's licence and should certainly include having one's vehicle towed away instantly. The financial penalties must be heavy. Most of the problems are created by commercial vehicles delivering goods and, at present, the trade-off in their favour—paying a parking ticket and delivering when it is convenient—is overwhelming. We must alter that, so that the trade-off for companies will be better if they delivered outside rush hours, or in ways and at times which did not reduce the capacity of main roads by one third or a half.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he not think that the very fact that there is still so much illegal parking in London is itself proof positive that the penalties for it are not nearly severe enough?

Mr. Maples: To some extent I agree with my hon. Friend, but not entirely. Penalties for the kind of parking that I am talking about are not severe enough. If we want to discourage commercial vehicles from delivering in Knightsbridge or Piccadilly, or main roads in the City, in rush hours, penalties must be severe. In such cases businesses pay the fines and £10 or £20 is no contest for the convenience. Most of the time the offenders are not caught anyway. Fines must be raised to provide a financial incentive for deliveries to be made outside rush hours.

In other cases, the police merely annoy motorists, as those of us who live in central London in places with residents parking zones, return home at 11 o'clock in the evening, park on a single yellow line and are fined, will know. I live in a square which does not have a main road through it. Only people who live there drive through it. However, often at 8.30 in the morning, traffic wardens give tickets to people with residents parking stickers who have left their vehicles on meters or yellow lines. They would be much better employed on main roads giving tickets to motorists who are disrupting traffic flow. Far more discretion should be exercised by the police and traffic wardens.

Mr. Heffer: I shall underline the hon. Gentleman's point with two examples. I never park illegally but once I returned to my flat from the House of Commons at 2 o'clock in the morning when it was dark and parked within the white lines as I was perfectly entitled. However, apparently there was a little notice on the wall that I did not see at that time of the morning which said that parking was not allowed in that place for a temporary period. I did not notice it. I wrote to the authority and said that I was sorry but I had not seen the notice because I had come home from the House at 2 o'clock in the morning. I was still fined and I was not happy.

On another occasion I came home at about the same time and again parked in the white lines but one third of the car was over the white line. I was fined again, and I wrote to the authority but I was still fined. I was not happy with that because at 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock in the morning I had tried to find an appropriate space in the residents' parking zone, for which we have to pay. Discretion should be used.

I underline the point made by the hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) that it is vital that vehicles should not be illegally parked on main roads and no discretion should be used there. However, in a side road or

a square, some discretion could be exercised. Sometimes, unnecessary antagonism develops between the motorist and the parking authority and that does not help to ensure strict parking regulations where they are required.

Mr. Maples: The hon. Gentleman is right. I share his experience. I was not fined, but my car was towed away because I did not see one of those little notices. I agree that that is annoying and I am interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister will say about police and traffic wardens, who could be more effective if they used greater discretion. Harassing residents at 8.30 in the morning when main roads are blocked by inconsiderate parking is a wholly inappropriate use of their resources. Not only does it fail to remove congestion but it aggravates the average, law-abiding citizen.

Mr. Skinner: I wonder if there is anything to be learnt from the Spanish experience and whether we could check how parking limitations are operated there. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) should have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mr. Heddle) who is well versed in these matters. The incident might be sub judice in Spanish terms so he must be careful how he phrases his remarks.

Mr. Adley: Subo judicio!

Mr. Skinner: Is it? It sounds like Subbuteo. The hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire may have some valuable experience to relate to the House. It is a pity that he is not here. Has he been fetched back? The Spanish experience may help us.

Mr. Maples: The experiences of other countries are interesting and no doubt the hon. Member for Bolsover in his contribution will bring to bear his vast international experience of parking regulations in other countries.

Reducing congestion on roads would also speed up bus times. I do not wish to exaggerate, as I understand that most bus delays are not caused by traffic jams but many of them are. My hon. Friend the Minister can correct me if I am wrong. One sees buses stuck in jams and they would be a quicker and more effective means of transport if they could be released from jams. The average traffic speed in central London during the day is about 11 mph and the average speed of a bus must be about half that. If buses could be speeded up, they would become a more attractive means of transport.

New clauses 1 and 5 deal with buses and coaches, which should not be parked on roads but in local authority car parks. I have already mentioned the chaos that these vehicles cause on the Embankment. They do not pay for the economic cost of the road space that they use or the congestion that they cause. New clause 1 would reduce their numbers and have a real effect on London traffic.

10.30 am

I am also worried about the vast size of some of the coaches on London's roads—they are becoming as big as the average EEC lorry. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister plans to conduct any battles about them in Brussels. Perhaps this is the selfish attitude of a London resident, but I cannot help questioning whether we need to go on promoting tourism in central London in the summer, when London seems to become the preserve of the tourists and their coaches. Perhaps promoting tourism to other parts of the United Kingdom or laying off promoting it in London would be good for the tourists and for those of us who live here, and it would relieve a little of the extra congestion that tourism adds. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) has tabled his own new clause, which may provide a better solution than mine to this problem. I shall be interested to hear what the Minister has to say. We must deal with it.

New clause 4 deals with deliveries, which constitute a large part of anti-social parking. They cause many of the major problems on main roads in the rush hour, turning six-lane roads into four lanes and reducing four lanes to two. I have suggested that three yellow line offences might be appropriate for limited periods, with heavy fines to discourage such deliveries.

The combination of new clauses 1, 4 and 5 would substantially increase the sensible use of our road space at virtually negligible cost. The cost to the public sector and the average motorist would be zero; to the extent that there is a cost, it would be externalised and passed on to buses, coaches and delivery vehicles. It is an appropriate use of public policies in these circumstances to make people bear the costs of the congestion that they cause by using the roads as car parks.

New clause 2 is selected for debate in a separate group. I am not sure why: I should have been happy to discuss it with this group. Perhaps it is House protocol to defer to diplomats, and perhaps we need a Foreign Office Minister to reply to the debate—I know not.

New clause 3 is a pet peeve of mine. Perhaps one is allowed a peeve on a Friday morning. I think that commercial vehicles in residents' parking areas are inappropriate. They spoil the environment for the residents and are another encroachment on some of the few remaining pleasant areas of London. Perhaps most importantly, it encourages the use of commercial vehicles for commuting—they are almost always used to take people to work and back. It is inappropriate that they should be allowed residents' parking spaces; they take up space and encourage more traffic.

To summarise, we face many serious transport problems in London. We cannot solve them by building more roads, which merely encourage more traffic. We must encourage traffic to come off the roads and we must make better use of the roads. Parking is crucial. We must get coaches off the streets and into special car parks and stop peak hour deliveries in main streets. Then we shall have achieved a low-cost way of obtaining greater utilisation of our roads.

Mr. Adley: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on his Bill, on the speed with which he has been able to bring it before the House, and on providing the House with an important and invaluable opportunity to discuss transport and related matters. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) on his perspicacious new clauses. My new clause follows the theme set out by my hon. Friends

The problems of parking in London are well known, but this is a national Bill that does not deal with London alone. It would be wrong to assume that what happens here does not happen elsewhere, too—*[Interruption.]* Does my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) want to intervene? He seemed to be talking about

[Mr. Adley]

something, and as his comments are usually so interesting —probably more so than my speech—I tried to catch what he was saying.

I want to take up one or two points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West about commuting to London. He said that many people commuted from 25 miles away and had to pay their own substantial costs. What he did not say, and perhaps should have said, was that that is certainly true of those who use some public transport—particularly the railways—but people who use their own cars to commute to central London, and especially those who use the new breed of commuter coaches, pay nothing like the cost. Most of their costs are borne by the taxpayer and by London ratepayers. I shall come on in a moment to explain the relevance of that to the proposition we are debating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West to make a point about this. On this rare occasion I believe that I can carry the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) with me. It is absolute nonsense to imagine that we can solve the traffic problems in this country without planning. Equally, it is nonsense to pretend that the Government's recent legislation has not been partly responsible for some of the present problems in our towns and cities. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister does not like my saying this, but some of the deregulation measures have undoubtedly exacerbated the problem of congestion. The fact is that public transport and party political dogma are uneasy bedfellows—whether the dogma is of the Left or the Right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West said that we all paid a great deal of money for our road fund tax and that it should be spent on roads. Hypothecation of that sort has never been followed by any Government. It is a pet theory of the AA and the RAC. Before we allow ourselves to be seduced by such an argument we should realise that hypothecation of this sort is ludicrous. If hypothecation of taxation were seriously considered, the money raised from the betting tax would presumably have to be spent on building more casinos, an idea that would not attract many in the House or in the country.

Originally, the Bill's title was the Road Traffic Regulation (Parking) Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East on sensibly reducing the length of the title, but the original title was certainly rather more descriptive of the Bill's contents. Nevertheless, "Parking" makes a nice short title.

I turn now to new clause 7 and I want to speak about the Government's deregulation legislation and its effect on some of the traffic and parking problems from which we now suffer. My hon. Friend the Minister did not attend, but I recall a meeting myself, my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Mr. Wheeler), the chief executive of the Westminster city council, the Secretary of State for Transport, and the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Minister. It was held well over a year ago and it was to discuss, frankly, the effect of Government legislation on London's traffic problems——

Mr. Skinner: A sinister little group. Does she know?

Mr. Adley: Is the hon. Gentleman referring to Lady Porter?

Mr. Skinner: I am referring to Gorby's friend—so-called. That is the flavour of the month. Did the Prime Minister know about this little clandestine arrangement? Was she made aware of what could be called a sort of pseudo-kitchen cabinet which was trying to undermine the free market,. enterprise culture philosphy? I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has come out with this information; it means that this little group can be the next target. She cannot unseat the Minister—his star has been rising, but it will suddenly wane as a result of what has taken place. The hon. Gentleman should reveal all.

Mr. Adley: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman. The meeting took place in the office of the Secretary of State for Transport and was attended by civil servants. I never made any secret of the meeting and I am delighted again to have the opportunity to emphasise that my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General, in his capacity as a first-class constituency Member, overcame his reticence at being seen in a meeting with one of his ministerial colleagues to discuss a matter that is of concern to his constituents even though that might have implied slight criticism of certain Government policies.

As I am sure the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) knows, the Conservative party is a broad church. When he spoke about a lady he might have been alluding to the fact that Mr. Rodney Brooke, the former chief executive of Westminster city council, might have had more trouble with his erstwhile boss than my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General has had with his boss. Unfortunately, Mr. Rodney Brooke is no longer able to pursue his duties as chief executive of Westminster city council. However, I would be out of order if I were to discuss the fate of certain London cemeteries and I have no intention of so doing.

Government legislation has removed the rights and duties of local authorities, especially London local authorities, to designate coach routes. As a result, coaches are flying hither and thither and parking hither and thither all over London, and that is undoubtedly a significant factor in the creation of London's traffic problems. Vehicles cannot park where they are not allowed to go and, conversely, do park where they do go. If we remove the restrictions on the routes that coaches may take, they will use every route that suits them, regardless of the social consequences and the interests of other road users and residents. In this debate, therefore, we cannot sensibly separate where they park from how they get there.

Coach routes are a material factor in the debate and in that context my first quotation is from the leader of the Kensington and Chelsea council when he referred to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to which this Bill is related. In a letter to me as long ago as 5 January 1987 he said of licences that the council used to be able to issue:

> "These licences prescribe the routes which those coaches have to take and coaches can stop only at prescribed stopping places. The positive control which has existed hitherto was carried out by the Metropolitan Police Traffic Commissioner and proved generally effective. Coaches for the most part stuck to the prescribed route as failure to do so could affect the renewal of the licence. Certainly this Council, and I dare say Westminster as well, will certainly use what powers we have. Our complaint is, however, that they simply are not as satisfactory as the form of regulation which applied before."

The two major central London local authorities, both firmly Conservative-controlled, are frank in their criticism that that legislation has had a serious effect on traffic congestion and parking in London.

The whole question of deregulation causes me concern because at the last general election I occasionally addressed my constituents from an open-topped bus. I used to pass little minibuses that had sprung up as a result of deregulation. They were called "Charlie's cars" and I used to bellow through my loudspeaker, "Charlie's cars, Conservative transport policy in action." I cannot use that phrase in the next general election, because Charlie's cars have gone bankrupt.

The problem with parking is that one man's convenience is another man's pollution. I am prepared to plead guilty to an obsession with matters such as pollution and congestion. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, and perhaps the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East may recall that in 1979 on the Merchant Shipping Bill I persuaded the Committee to accept a new clause that made the owner, rather than the carrier, of oil responsible for pollution at sea. The then Minister, Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis, in the Labour Government resisted my new clause, as did the spokesman for the Conservative party. However, the other members of the Committee accepted it, it was written into the legislation at that stage and the oil companies went berserk. It is a pity that the Americans did not have such legislation on their statute book to cover happenings in the last month.

10.45 am

We are beginning to accept the phrase, "The polluter pays." I do not want to digress but I hope that the National Rivers Authority set up by the Water Bill will take that point on board. Parking is a form of pollution and at the moment the people who cause the problem in London are not paying for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) when he was Minister for Public Transport wrote to me on 4 December 1987 about the Transport Act 1985. He said:

"our objective in the Transport Act 1985 was to free operators of local bus services from the dead weight of restrictions imposed by the former route licensing system—in the same way as we deregulated long distance coach services back in 1980."

The quotation from the leader of the Kensington and Chelsea council, and other quotations which I shall use, show that the social and pollution costs of congestion as a result of that deregulation have been far too high for us to allow the situation to continue for much longer.

I want to say one thing firmly and clearly in praise of my hon. Friend the Minister and the Government, and it is about the arrangement in the Budget to increase the road fund tax on coaches. That is directly relevant to what we are discussing. For years, coaches were the only form of transport that was not paying its track costs. If the Minister gets any complaints from coach operators about now having to pay their track costs, he will be perfectly entitled to blame me as much as he likes for obsessively pursuing the matter for years. I am grateful to the Chancellor and to the Ministers at the Department of Transport for accepting my proposals, but there is a great deal more to do. I hope that the Bill will do a little more to restore the balance between people and the environment of the cities in which they live, because our cities are adversely affected by pollution, especially coach pollution resulting from some of the deregulation measures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West allowed me to intervene in his speech. In that intervention I said that the Secretary of State for Transport told me in a letter only yesterday that only 7 per cent. of police time is allocated by the Department in its assessment of the police contribution to the assessed track costs of the internal combustion engine. The police do not just attend accidents and control traffic. We must also consider traffic wardens, court time and the cost of running the driver and vehicle licensing establishment at Swansea. I simply do not believe that a mere 7 per cent. of the cost of police time is an accurate assessment of the real track costs.

In the same letter my right hon. Friend mentioned the costs of accidents. About 5,000 people a year are killed on our roads and my hon. Friend the Minister had made a valuable contribution to reducing that figure. However, we are still talking about 5,000 people being killed and 250,000 being maimed on our roads every year. The costs of hospitalisation, hospital treatment and Department of Social Security payments as a result of accidents are not included in the assessment of track costs when assessing submissions in connection with road versus rail investment.

Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will allow me to make a specific suggestion. In this country we need something which we have never had before: we need a highway patrol. We need a completely separate police force dealing with road traffic matters. It should have a separate budget so that the police can deal with criminal matters while the highway patrol can deal with road traffic problems. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West that London and most of our major cities do not need huge new motorways. We have micro problems that are causing major congestion. These problems will not and should not be solved by driving six-lane motorways through our cities.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am grateful for the chance to repeat what I, what the Secretary of State and what my predecessor at the Department of Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), who is now the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, have said—that the Government have no plans to drive new motorways into London. The problem is that some people persist in issuing leaflets stating the opposite. Having whispered it now on the Floor of the House, I hope that it will be taken as a leak, rather like a document found on a photocopier. I hope that people will stop saying that we have any proposals for new motorways for London.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend has made a very important statement. My elder son Simon, who has a flat in Battersea, an area which is thought to be blighted by the threat of a new road—and I am sure that the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) will share my enthusiasm for my hon. Friend the Minister's comments—will be absolutely delighted. I am sure that my son will not do anything so stupid or so silly as to listen to my speech, let alone read it, so I will tell him at the weekend what my hon. Friend the Minister has said. My estimable secretary, who has been responsible for coping with my obsession with these matters over the years, lives in Barnes and she will also be delighted by my hon. Friend's comments.

[Mr. Adley]

We nearly all agree that the solution to the traffic problems in our major cities is not to drive more roads through them, but to deal with the micro problems. Coaches represent one of the serious micro problems and that is why my new clause concentrates on them. We need tighter controls, not endless motorway construction.

I want to thank the officers of Westminster city council for the time and trouble that they have taken in dealing with my numerous inquiries into these matters over the years. I am sure that they would share my enthusiasm for my new clause which relates to the duties of local authorities and of police forces. In a letter to me dated 1 February this year, Mr. Rodney Brooke, the now sadly former chief executive of the council, said:

"The vexed issue of coaches requires the joint consideration of both the City Council and the Metropolitan Police to achieve a sound strategy."

I hope that that will encourage my hon. Friend the Minister to accept new clause 7.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West referred to the beneficiaries of the Government's deregulation policies. With regard to London's traffic and the coach parking problem, it seems to me that the main beneficiaries have been stockbroker belt commuters from Reading, Oxford and parts of Kent. Coaches carry those commuters roaring into London on roads provided by the taxpayer. Many of the coaches park in the centre of London, often all day long, and they pay nothing for parking. If we look around Parliament square we can easily see what my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West meant when he said that selfish parking often cuts road space by 50 per cent. The Embankment is reduced from two lanes to one. Outside this building in New Palace Yard two lanes are reduced to one and similarly two lanes are reduced to one on Westminster bridge.

While tourist coaches are partly responsible for the problem, the commuter coaches which inevitably use the roads during the rush hours because of the very nature of their job, are a major cause of congestion in London.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West referred to the beneficiaries of deregulation. I want to refer to the losers. Road users have lost as a result of added congestion. Pedestrians have lost because of increased fumes and ratepayers are losing through the cost of an endless supply of "No Coach Parking" signs and through the endless supply of new cast iron bollards which the central London local authorities are required to provide.

Mr. Skinner: And the cyclists.

Mr. Adley: Yes, but the cyclists are not a charge on the ratepayer. How much does this cost? It must be a jolly good business for the manufacturers of cast iron bollards. Because local authorities have lost powers as a result of Government legislation, they have to buy huge quantities of cast iron bollards and then instal them on street corners to try to prevent coaches from using unsuitable roads.

With regard to the relationship between track costs of road versus rail, it seems that while commuter coaches park in central London and pay nothing, British Rail must pay £42 million in rates. New clause 5 refers to an obligation on local authorities to provide parking spaces for coaches. The obligation may well be on local authorities, but the coach operators should pay. There is no earthly reason why ratepayers should pay. The commuter coach and tourist coach operators should pay fo coach parking facilities.

In the large coach park on what was until recently British Rail land in Battersea, coaches are paying 50p a day to park. That land I believe has just been sold for £49 million. If we relate the size of a coach to the value of the land which has just changed hands, instead of paying 50p a day, coaches should be paying at least £10 a day to park there.

Mr. Skinner: Who bought the land?

Mr. Adley: I am afraid that I am not an estate agent and I cannot answer the question.

Mr. Skinner: Was it Al-Fayed?

Mr. Adley: I do not think that it was the Al-Fayeds. I believe it was bought by an anonymous Swiss property company, but I am sure the information could readily be made available to the hon. Member for Bolsover. However, I do not know whether that is particularly relevant to this debate.

My new clause is concerned with coaches parking in London. I have received a letter from the deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan police. His comments about the effect of Government legislation on the Metropolitan police are devastating. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West perhaps tended to criticise the police for not doing enough to deter people who park illegally. However, by allowing some of this legislation through, we have been partly guilty of placing a huge additional burden on the police by exacerbating the problem.

On 15 January 1987 Deputy Assistant Commissioner Innes wrote:

"You will be aware of the fact that in the Central Area problems with coaches are quite horrendous. We have to balance the proper desire of the tourist boards to attract visitors to London alongside the vastly increased use of coaches for commuting purposes, all in streets designed for horses and carts."

Similarly, the British Railways Board wrote to me about the effect of legislation on its business. On 11 December the board's parliamentary affairs manager wrote:

"We can't hope to match their cost structure, as they pay a nominal track cost, and nothing for terminals, using the street both as a pick-up point and, in many cases, for parking."

To their credit, the Government have begun to deal with the track cost problem. However, my new clause seeks to deal with the other aspects of parking and road use problems, particularly in London.

I referred a moment ago to bollards. On 26 August 1988 I received a letter from the assistant divisional director responsible for highways and environmental design at Westminster city council who stated:

"heavy duty cast iron bollards are to replace those formerly in-situ. These should prove more of a deterrent to coaches than those previously in use, which were knocked over on at least three occasions."

So the anti-social behaviour of coach drivers in London includes deliberately knocking over bollards erected to keep coaches away from certain roads and streets. Those bollards have to be used because of legislation passed by the House, which removed from local authorities their powers to regulate the movement of coaches.

11 am

When my hon. Friend the Member replies, I hope that he will refer to the Bus and Coach Council's code of practice. In a Department of Transport press notice dated 2 March 1988, my hon. Friend in his enthusiasm said that that code of practice was

"a breakthrough, especially for Londoners".

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very reluctant to pursue a matter that has already been gone into, but I request that when considering the matter next Monday and Tuesday, Mr. Speaker takes into account the broadcast made by the former Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) on "The World at One" yesterday, when he made important statements about how the Government and the House might conduct themselves. It is my simple request that Mr. Speaker listens to a recording of that six-mintue interview before making any further rulings.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Speaker carefully studies the *Official Report* and he will certainly read the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

Mr. Adley: Before that intervention, I was referring to the Department of Transport's press notice No. 93 of 2 March 1988 relating to the Bus and Coach Council's code of practice. Its four recommendations were to use only designated coach parking areas, to ensure that coaches stopped only as long as necessary when setting down and picking up passengers, to avoid driving coaches down narrow residential streets, and not to keep engines running when coaches were parked near to houses unless it was necessary. My hon. Friend the Minister described that as "a breakthrough, especially for Londoners".

From 2 March 1988 until today is one of the longest and slowest breakthroughs in history. It has not happened yet. In the realms of wishful thinking, that press notice must rate high on the Richter scale.

As long ago as 1 August 1985, my hon. Friend's predecessor, writing to me about coach parking in London, observed:

"On a wider front we have by no means been idle."

There is encouragement for us all. He also mentioned

"an urgent review of the scope for making use of publicly owned land for short and longer term parking for coaches, in order to relieve the problems caused by on-street parking".

That urgent review was supposed to have taken place four years ago. I do not know what has happened in the four years since. Perhaps my hon. Friend will be able to tell me. My hon. Friend the Minister himself gave a written reply in which he recognised the problems of pollution. He stated:

"The question of avoidable pollution from parked coaches in London has been raised at the coaches working party chaired by Westminster city council. We shall urgently consider any recommendations that they make to deal with this question."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. *152*.]

The word "urgency" is used frequently but subsequent action is barely discernible. Over the past few years, legislation has exacerbated the situation. There have been many words recognising the difficulties but precious little action.

The head of administration, territorial operations, Scotland Yard, Mr. B. Arnold, wrote to me on 2 March 1987—these things always seem to happen on my birthday. He commented:

"Regrettably, the overall situation has not improved. This is certainly the case regarding provision of suitable off-street parking facilities, and is not likely to get better until a large enough replacement for Victoria Coach Station is found. Any solution will also need to provide for the large number of commuter coaches which daily use the central area."

Making reference to the resources at his disposal, Mr. Arnold deals with the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West that we have placed a huge additional burden on police forces by creating, through transport legislation, problems of the kind that we are now debating.

I do not want to weary the House, but I have done a lot of work on this subject over the past few years. I discussed the matter of coach deregulation with Sir Keith Bright, former chairman and chief executive of London Regional Transport. He wrote to me on 17 November 1987, stating:

"These increases in coach services have placed pressure on the limited space for terminating and parking coaches in Central London and have increased the problem of inappropriate coach routings through London . . .

"The 1980 Transport Act has also led to increased use of coaches for daily commuting and although these provide a lower cost alternative to the railways they do add to traffic congestion on busy inner and central London roads. Perhaps more important is the accumulation of coaches, found at such places as the Embankment, setting down in the morning and waiting to leave in the evening. This can cause severe local traffic congestion which acts to the detriment of bus services when they are particularly busy. LRT is not opposed to commuter coach operations but believes that stricter controls over their stopping on the highway are needed."

I call in aid the comments of my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, who, writing to me on 22 December 1986, commented:

"Where coaches are illegally parked and left unattended, enforcement action is taken, although consideration has to be given to the possibility of perhaps fifty or more passengers being stranded if a coach is removed or wheelclamped. The problems of illegal parking are most acute during the early evening peak period, when the police concentrate their resources on maintaining traffic flow on the main radial routes out of London."

How much more evidence does my hon. Friend the Minister need? The police, Home Office, London Regional Transport, British Rail and local authorities in London are all telling him the same story. However, all we see are press releases making frequent use of the word "urgency" and precious little happening. A policy of clamping coaches may be inconvenient for the 50 passengers affected, but are we to condone illegality by coach companies because to do otherwise may be to inconvenience their customers? If carried to its extreme, that proposition would have horrendous consequences.

Picking up on a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West, I suggest that the Department should do a deal with British Rail, which should be permitted to develop a rail loading bay at somewhere like Olympia, to which illegally parked coaches could be towed and then transported to the nethermost points of the kingdom. Those of Scottish Coaches could be taken to St. Ives in Cornwall, and of Western National to Thurso or Wick. They would then have to return at their own expense. I suspect that that would quickly solve the problem.

My final comment is about the additional pollution caused by parked coaches whose drivers keep their engines running. That horrendous practice forces diesel fumes into the nostrils of pedestrians, cyclists, and people living nearby. It is an anti-social and wholly unacceptable practice that is willingly practised by coach companies all

[Mr. Adley]

the time. The managing director of Southend Transport Ltd., writing to me on 3 February 1988, indicated that he was quite happy for his coaches to park on double yellow lines at Hyde park corner. He further writes:

"The road west of Hyde Park Corner is part of the Company's registered X1 route to and from Heathrow Airport. The vehicle would, therefore, have been in service between the Airport and Southend. It would have been waiting time to operate as per the public timetable. It is not the practice to turn off engines in such a situation."

That practice is disgraceful and deliberately creates pollution. It is, of course, contrary to the Bus and Coach Council Code of Practice. The Government should take immediate action to make it illegal. A former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West, in a letter to me, commented:

"The Road Vehicle (Constructon and Use) Regulations 1986 make it an offence to leave the engine running if the driver is not in the cab."

We all know what goes on. The drivers are not in their cabs but sit with other staff, very often for two or three hours at a time, playing cards, taking their meals, or sleeping in their coaches.

Mr. Skinner: The problem does not only apply to coaches. I have noticed it outside the House of Lords. As the hon. Gentleman knows, their lordships need only come in, nod to the bobby, get signed in and pick up their £40 or £50 a day tax free. Sometimes when they do not want to stay but just want to clock in for the money, the chauffeurs keep their engines running. If hon. Members have a look any day at 2.30 they will see a car with the engine running and the lord trotting out—well, not really trotting—knowing that he will be in the place for only about three minutes. We could do with some decent statistics on that, seasonally adjusted.

Mr. Adley: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. As he says, vehicles waiting for people—sometimes for three minutes, but in the case of coaches often for two or three hours—with their engines running are a serious cause of pollution, particularly large diesel vehicles.

On the Embankment 10, 15 or sometimes 20 coaches park for hours on end. One driver stays to look after all the coaches. If the clamping man or the parking meter man comes along, the "duty driver" can get into whichever coach the man is looking at and say, "Look, I am on board. You cannot possibly do anything to me, because the vehicle is not unattended." That is part of the abuse —day in, day out—that is perpetrated by coach operators. Parked coaches are pouring diesel fumes all over our towns and cities.

In a *Sunday Times* article last week, Colin Dryden, referring to the 1984 Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, reported that smoke from diesel vehicles was

"in many circumstances at an unacceptable level . . . the vehicles themselves have got bigger and more powerful".

We all know that to be true. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West did not use the phrase "tower blocks on wheels" to describe some of the coaches that are polluting our cities today, so I shall do so now. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, has rightly pointed out that they are responsible for intimidatory driving.

I cannot always find it in my heart to praise the Americans, but, as the *Sunday Times* article rightly says, "American requirements are far tougher, particularly for buses, on the grounds that they put health more at risk through operating in cities."

I have reserved the last word for Deputy Assistant Commissioner Innes of the Metropolitan police. In one simple sentence he sums up what has been going on in London, and the problems created by recent legislation. After all, we have Mr. Gorbachev here today. He will be gone tomorrow, but transport problems, like the poor, are for ever with us and will get steadily worse. My hon. Friend the Minister must know that transport will be a major issue in the next general election.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Innes says:

"You will be aware that in the Central Area problems with coaches are quite horrendous."

They are indeed. My little new clause tries to deal with them, and I hope that my hon. Friend will find it acceptable.

11.15 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I am sure that all hon. Members who have listened to the debate will congratulate the hon. Members for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) and for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) on their interesting speeches, which provided plenty of statistics and plenty of food for thought. I support the new clauses, especially new clause 5, which requires that a

"Local Authority shall provide off-street parking facilities for buses and coaches."

That is long overdue.

The hon. Member for Christchurch rightly cited the problems in this area and adjacent to this building. Coaches used to come into London in great numbers only in the spring and summer months, but they now do so throughout the year. Because of the lack of proper parking facilities they park as far away as Lambeth and Wandsworth for hours on end, causing traffic chaos in those areas. Residents would no doubt welcome the proposals in the new clause, and progressive-thinking local authorities would probably consider the provision of such facilities to be one of their responsibilities.

Traffic problems are getting worse not only in London but in all our major cities. We hear a good deal from the Department of Transport in the form of press releases and so on but there is precious little hard evidence of real improvement to back it up. Today's debate has highlighted the absence of a proper integrated transport system, not only in London but in the whole country. Although it may be unpopular with some motorists, there is an urgent need for us to consider the requirements of the country and especially those of people who live in areas that suffer hour by hour, day by day, from the problems caused by all kinds of traffic.

When I hear statements from the Department of Transport followed by statements from the Department of the Environment, I sometimes wonder just how much co-ordination there is of the thinking of those Departments on issues in which both are involved. Judging by correspondence that I receive from my constituents, there is virtually none.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West made some telling points about parking, which are also touched on in his new clauses. He mentioned the problems caused by commercial vehicles, but many of the problems that I have observed are caused by private cars, especially when they

are parked in residential areas. I can speak only for London, but this may also apply in many other parts of the country. More and more private motor cars are double parked throughout the day and night. They are often not lit, and they cause enormous annoyance to residents as well as potential dangers. There seems, however, to be no policy on the matter. The police in my area say, "Well, sir, it is very difficult. What do we tell them to do?"

To a large extent I go along with the view of the hon. Member for Lewisham, West that penalties for illegal parking are not high enough and do not deter. Regrettably, however, throughout London—and, again, possibly in other major cities—there simply are not sufficient parking facilities, and matters will get worse as more and more cars come on to the roads. Until the problem is tackled, perhaps by the Department of Transport in co-operation with local authorities, indiscriminate parking will undoubtedly continue.

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Gentleman's remarks on the scourge of double parking will be welcomed by every sensible listener. Does he agree that the disease of recent years is becoming a scandal which must be dealt with as soon as possible? Should not double parking be made an absolute offence which should be prohibited full stop, except of course in the case of public service vehicles dealing with an emergency? Could we not also follow the example of Tokyo—albeit with a different street pattern—and require developers building new flats and blocks of flats to provide off-street parking spaces? Usually they do not bother, and, as with the coach problem, ratepayers, suffering residents and local authorities are left to pick up the tab.

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. All hon. Members will endorse his comments. He referred to property development. Those hon. Members with inner London constituencies know that there has been a great increase in the number of property conversions. Five or 10 years ago large houses were occupied by one family. Three or four families now live in them. Each family has a motor car and there are insufficient parking facilities. That issue must be tackled. If people say, "To hell with the regulations, I'm going to park here" that should be made an offence. People should lose points for doing that. Their cars are a potential danger to those who live in the area and to other motorists.

The Tooting Broadway area of my constituency used to be one of the most profitable commercial areas in Wandsworth. Putney, Clapham Junction and Balham were all popular but the money-making area was Tooting Broadway. It is fast going into a decline. The quality of the shops has not declined, but people no longer shop there because there are no parking facilities in the area.

The Underground station at Tooting Broadway and other underground stations in the area service the Northern line. Many commuters park their cars there between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning and leave them there until 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening. Local residents who want to use the facilities in the area in which they live and in which they are ratepayers are unable to do so because they can find nowhere to park. If they park on the highway, a traffic warden slaps a parking ticket on the car. Residents therefore say that they cannot run that risk. My area—and, I am sure, many other areas in London—is suffering as a consequence.

Big shopping developments have also caused problems. At Colliers Wood, the Savacentre has parking facilities for about 2,000 cars. There is no charge for parking cars there. The result is that long-established, thriving commercial areas are suffering because of the lack of parking facilities. Has any thought been given to that problem? I have taken up the matter with Wandsworth council. It has told me that it will think about it. It has been thinking about it for the past four years, but has done absolutely nothing about it. It is another example of uncontrolled traffic problems in London becoming a great menace.

When the hon. Member for Christchurch referred to motorways the Minister intervened. He criticised the scare stories that are being put about by various pressure groups and local authorities, such as Wandsworth and other south London boroughs, about major road development proposals. We may differ about whether they are motorway development proposals, but even the Minister must agree that they are major road development proposals that will affect areas such as Lambeth, Wandsworth, Fulham and Hammersmith and Richmond.

There have been a number of public meetings in the London borough of Wandsworth, which is Conservative controlled. I do not exaggerate when I say that hundreds of people attended those meetings. I chaired a meeting in my constituency on Wednesday of this week—one of the worst evenings that we have had so far this year—which was attended by over 300 people. They were there simply because of their serious worry about what they understand may happen in the area. I am referring to the western environmental improvement route.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I hope that we shall eventually return to parking. If the western environmental improvement route goes ahead, it will create two lanes of traffic towards the north end of Wandsworth bridge. The national taxpayer has paid half the cost of the York road improvement that has created four lanes coming in from Wandsworth Town station and two lanes coming in past the heliport from the other side. A degree of modesty by Wandsworth would appeal to those who are trying to solve the casualty and the environmental problems and who are trying to build in the economic advantages that may come from separating through traffic from those who live and work around the present Earl's Court one-way system that carries 100,000 vehicles a day—a greater volume of traffic than on some parts of the M25 and the M1.

Mr. Cox: The Minister would have been well advised not to say that. His comments will create a furore in the London borough of Wandsworth. That is a classic example of the lack of interest that many people believe the Department of Transport shows in Wandsworth's problems.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Will the hon. Gentleman, then, say how many pedestrian casualties are created by the Earl's Court one-way system? Has Wandsworth given him that figure?

Mr. Cox: No.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Until he knows, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman leaves it there and gets back to parking.

Mr. Cox: It is all very well for the Minister to say that I should leave it there and get back to parking but I

[Mr. Cox]

referred to the western environmental improvement route because it concerns parking, congestion, pollution and the standard of living of the people in the area. It does the Minister's case no good to dismiss the anxieties of my constituents and those in Richmond, Fulham and Hammersmith and Lambeth. If that is his attitude, he is in for a very rough ride from local people. Of course we want road improvements, but we do not want road improvements that lead to traffic from the Earl's Court area coming into Wandsworth and Lambeth. The Minister says, "Let's get the traffic out of Earl's Court. We won't worry too much about the problems that it will cause in Wandsworth and Lambeth."

I refer the Minister to statements by the Conservative controlled Wandsworth council. The Minister may say that he does not care about what Wandsworth council says, but he will start to care about what the residents of the borough are saying. All the evidence proves—it has not been disputed—that thousands and thousands of additional vehicles will come into our area every day, resulting in the problems to which the hon. Member for Lewisham, West referred. The issue will not go away. It is not a party political issue. All the political parties in Wandsworth are united about fighting any attempt to destroy our community. However, in his two interventions the Minister has displayed arrogance about our fears.

11.30 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On the day when we announced the result of stage 1 of the assessment studies, I attended a meeting organised by the Wandsworth Society to discuss the proposals. The Wandsworth Society was interested in the northern, rather than the southern, part of the borough, and at that point people were rather keen that risk to local residents, whether north or south of the Thames should be reduced. On the wall of the local library were hung the Wandsworth Society's own tentative plans for taking through traffic out of the main shopping area of Wandsworth.

The hon. Gentleman should try to address the question more quietly, and, if he has any influence with the people of Wandsworth, he should try to persuade them into discussion rather than adopting a somewhat casual attitude both to the environmental impact of existing through traffic and rat-running, and to the Department's proposals. He should do that rather than exaggerating and thus casting a cloud of fear over those who seek improvements that they have failed to achieve in the past few decades.

Mr. Cox: I met four members of the Wandsworth Society in the House last night. I understand that they are shortly to meet the Minister. Now that they have examined the proposals in detail, they are very worried about what may happen in the borough. I am sure that the Conservative-controlled borough of Wandsworth will read the Minister's comments with great interest.

Let me deal with another aspect of the matter which, sad to say, has not been dealt with adequately in this debate. We all know the problems that an increased volume of traffic causes. If we are to tackle the problem realistically in London, we must give much more thought to the development of public transport. I believe that in the not-too-distant future we shall have a different pricing policy for motorists coming into London. I think that that will happen, even though it may not be a popular development. We must develop our bus and train services in and out of London and within London in a way that we have not developed them in recent years.

The Northern line, a major Underground line, runs through south London and my constituency. There are enormous problems with that line. We could reduce the volume of traffic greatly if we provided services that the general public wanted to use because they were confident of their punctuality and quality. Then the problems to which hon. Members have referred today would start to decrease.

The new clauses are valid, and I support them, but we must face the fact that we shall have to improve the public transport system in London. At present, people are unhappy about using the services. In my area, one of the great problems is that the escalators often do not work. People say, "I shall not use the Underground because I cannot walk up and down those enormous flights of stairs." There are not sufficient staff at stations to look after passengers, and we all know of the violence that takes place. If we could start to tackle those problems and invest more in public transport and improve public confidence in it, greater use would be made of it. The problems of congestion and pollution referred to today would start to be greatly reduced.

The new clauses are to be welcomed, but, rather than the piecemeal approach that they represent, we need a real attempt by the Department of Transport to produce a coherent policy to tackle the problems of transport in London. The sooner that is done, the better it will be, not only for those who live and work here but for the country as a whole. That is what we should be discussing.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope). He has had the good fortune to come top in the ballot. That could happen to any of us, but my hon. Friend has chosen a matter of the greatest importance and has succeeded in making progress on Second Reading and in Committee in what must almost be record time. It is a tribute to my hon. Friend that there was no debate on Second Reading because there was such broad assent to the Bill. It is a further tribute to my hon. Friend that the Committee stage was completed in 75 minutes.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) is well qualified to address the House on this subject. He is a former alderman of the borough of Fulham; he used to represent Wandsworth, and he now represents Tooting. I listened with great attention to what he said.

You will remember vividly, Madam Deputy Speaker, that 49 weeks ago today we celebrated the 87th birthday of the late emperor of Japan. You may remember that date: it was 29 April 1988, and you were in the Chair. Just after you had climbed into the Chair, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department made these immortal comments:

"We need to know who is in the Chamber."—[*Official Report*, 29 April 1988; Vol. 132, c. 628.]

That is my view, although they were not my words. They were the words of one of Her Majesty's Ministers. That opinion was not challenged by the occupant of the Chair. It was not challenged a year ago by anyone seated on the Opposition Front Bench or even by anyone sitting below the Gangway. It is true that my hon. Friend the Member

for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) was not in his place; perhaps he would have dissented from the views then expressed by my hon. Friend.

I wish to follow the advice given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. It is in accordance with that advice, not challenged at the time from any part of the House, that we may legitimately draw your attention, Madam Deputy Speaker, to a phenomenon that is not unknown. At no stage in our proceedings today has there been present a single representative of the Liberal party or a single representative of the Social and Liberal Democrats—not one. I have been vigilant.

The Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household is not in his weekend attire this morning, the only concession made to the fact that it is Friday being the brown shoes upon his feet. My hon. Friend is not always visible——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman always make a most amusing speech and takes his time with the preamble. I hope that he may be reaching the end of his preamble and that we shall soon hear the fascinating comments that he has to make about the new clauses.

Mr. Gow: The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) does not dissent from my assertion that not a single representative of both minority parties lhas been present, even though they claim to be champions of the people. Naturally, the Ulster Unionist party has been well represented. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) was present, and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) contributed to our debate. The House will have noted that the hon. Member for Bolsover shares a hobby with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East. Each is a keen player of the ancient game of tennis. The hon. Member for Bolsover may have left the Chamber to play tennis. He cannot be playing with my hon. Friend as my hon. Friend is vigilant and is in his place.

I hope that the new clause will be accepted by my hon. Friend, although I fear that it may not be. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, whose wife's presence we all deplore——

Mr. Peter Bottomley: What?

Mr. Gow: I apologise. We deplore her absence. Please forgive me. It is most uncharacteristic of my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley), not to be present.

Mr. Bottomley: She will be here later.

Mr. Gow: Then my hon. Friends and I will stay. The hon. Member for Tooting will stay, and so will my hon. and reverend Friend from the Province, the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

Mr. Bottomley: I went to another place two days ago to listen to a debate on road users and the law. I had an opportunity to hear an interchange between Baroness Masham and her noble kinsman the Earl of Swinton when he was correcting her. I shall not do that today, so one need not wait for a similar occurrence.

Mr. Gow: I am grateful for that illuminating intervention.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston-upon-Hull, East): It is an illuminating speech.

Mr. Gow: I do not want to be led astray by the hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East, even though he is seated on the Opposition Front Bench.

We have had an important debate, because parking is of great interest to the people of London. There is a lack of adequate parking facilities in London. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) pointed out in his admirable speech, the lack of parking facilities and the fact that motors must be parked on the roads are major contributory factors in the gradual decline in the speed at which London traffic moves. A most telling point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West. Even a single motor parked in a road can impede traffic flow to an astonishing degree.

11.45 am

My hon. Friend the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, who has taken time off from his onerous duties overseeing the finances of our Sovereign, will probably have journeyed this morning in a motor from his house to the House of Commons. I shall give way to my hon. Friend so that he can confirm whether that is an accurate observation. We do not hear frequently from my hon. Friend.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Just as well.

Mr. Gow: I find myself in respectful disagreement with the Chair. I should like to hear more from my hon. Friend. He came to my constituency and made a superb speech of which you would have approved, Madam Deputy Speaker, but he will not speak today. I invited him to speak. I introduced him a fortnight ago today. The hon. Member for Bolsover will be pleased, because my hon. Friend travelled in a railway train. We were not contributing to traffic congestion. We made a journey, each accompanied by the other.

Mr. Adley: When the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred to one of our hon. Friends, we were at pains to know the Spanish translation for the term "sub judice". As my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel Jones) is fluent in Spanish, he might be able to help us and the *Hansard* staff.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend is fluent in Spanish and in many other languages as well, but we do not want to be led astray. We might be rebuked by the Chair if we refer to the brilliantly gifted woman who is married to the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household.

The Government should direct much more attention to parking in London. Mercifully, the Minister is in his place. Mercifully, there are few Ministers whose prospects are more glittering than those of my hon. Friend. He would enhance his prospects for promotion if he were able to speed the flow of traffic. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West spoke about London, but the matter concerns not just London or even England. I say that to my hon. and reverend Friend the Member for Belfast, South. Even in Belfast, a city which my hon. Friend knows better than I do, but even I am a fairly frequent visitor——

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): And North Down.

Mr. Gow: I do not want to stray into that matter. I wish North Down Conservatives well. I will not be led astray.

[Mr. Gow]

Even my hon. Friend the Minister does not have ministerial responsibility for the city of Belfast. Hon. Members will have noticed the final clause which states that the Bill

"does not extend to Northern Ireland."

But it should extend to Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East represents one of the great cities of our land. If he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, he will not tell the House that there is no problem about parking in Leeds. He will not tell the House that the traffic flows rapidly in Leeds. That will not be the burden of his speech. Therefore, the problem is not only in London or in our great cities but in many of our towns. It is a growing problem, partly because of the success of my hon. Friends who are seated on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Dykes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend will be able to speak. If he intervenes during my speech, I may speak longer. We do not want that. I want to try to bring my speech to a conclusion. As much as I try, I am not assisted by my hon. Friend if he asks me to give way.

It is because of the success of those who are seated upon the Treasury Bench that more and more of our citizens have motors. The hon. Member for Tooting, who is a former Lord Commissioner of the Treasury, knows about these matters. He was a Minister in the Treasury. He knows what has happened. He knows that more and more of those people who, in the past, would have dreamt of having a motor now have motors. The hon. Gentleman —I almost called him my hon. Friend—is with me when I say that there are families of relatively modest means with two or even three motors, and they are not all minis. Some of them are made overseas. Too many of them are made overseas; not enough are made here. It is because of the growth of motor ownership, achieved through the success of the Government's economic policies.

I know what an enthusiastic supporter of the monetarist cause my hon. Friend is. He is one of the driest of the dries. He is one of those who said, "Let us bear down upon inflation and let us, therefore, having had one great economic success, provide more motors for the people." We are all Thatcherites now. My hon. Friend is a Thatcherite. Because of the economic success and the extent of the ownership of motors, my hon. Friend the Minister has these problems. If we had not been so successful in extending the ownership of motors, my hon. Friend's Bill might not have been necessary.

I fear that even the Minister, as wise as he is on so many matters, may not be wise enough on the new clause. I hope that he will advise the House to agree the new clause, because it will diminish grievous parking problems. We need to provide more space to park motors, and we need to enforce the existing parking regulations much more strictly. We need to impose much heavier penalties on those who defy the law on parking. I welcome the Bill and should have liked to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to address the House.

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Leeds, North-East): Listening to the debate, I felt on occasion that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time or was reading the wrong Order Paper. Nevertheless, it has been a most useful debate thus far in which we have discussed not only parking but cruising, walking, cycling and—close to the other place —trotting, and we have certainly said a lot about not moving.

I have been impressed by the industry and ingenuity of my hon. Friends in devising sufficient new clauses to more than double the number that I had in the original Bill. Perhaps naively, I was working at the time on the premise that small is beautiful. I seem to have ended up with a greater number of interests, which I very much welcome, and a debate that has been much broader than I thought it might be. However, it has served to underline the importance of parking and attendant matters relating to traffic movement to the people of this country.

I am worried about the content of the new clauses because, although they may be desirable in their own respective ways, I am not sure that the Bill is the right vehicle—if I may use that word—for them. If the new clauses were accepted, they would increase the scope of the Bill dramatically and radically change its basic nature. Apart from that, they would attract considerable controversy, which I set out to avoid by being modest in my proposals.

There is, of course, the question of pragmatism, practical politics and what one can actually achieve. I think that the Bill, as proposed and as amended in Committee, is a pragmatic measure that will meet with great support from all quarters. Indeed, I have already received considerable evidence that there is support for it. I am pleased that, among other bodies, the Association of District Councils is particularly keen to see the Bill enacted because it believes that it will enhance and give greater flexibility to the powers of local authorities in relation to parking.

The fact that the title of the Bill was changed in Committee has been mentioned. I make no apology for it. It was an amendment that I moved because I believed that it would make the Bill clearer and easier to understand than did the original title, which appeared to have a rather abstract meaning which could be interpreted in many different ways.

Before I deal in detail with new clause 1, I should like to say a few general words about the purpose of the Bill because this is my first opportunity to do so on the Floor of the House. Hon. Members have been kind in their remarks about the speed with which the legislation has gone forward. I hope that it was well considered in Committee—I am sure that it was—and although the Bill has reached this stage quite speedily, it has received attention and has been considered carefully by many hon. Members.

As this is my first opportunity on the Floor of the House, I should like to emphasise that I have deliberately confined the Bill to a single aspect of parking—the method of payment. My main purpose is to increase choice and flexibility in the arrangements that local authorities can make for off-street car parking. As we have heard today, there are many other aspects of parking provision and enforcement. It may well be that in due course other measures should properly follow to take account of the new efficiency that I hope will arise as a result of this legislation. Some of the new clauses have highlighted those other issues, but I am reluctant to widen the scope of the

Bill along those lines. I believe that the Bill as it stands will benefit many people and, as far as I can envisage, do nobody any harm.

The Bill does not raise any new issues of principle but clarifies and extends an area of the law on parking controls while—this is terribly important—also allowing much greater opportunity for emerging technology. We hear a lot about technology and I think it important that at every opportunity where technology can be applied without harming people or their freedoms, it should be applied.

I have already mentioned local authorities. I emphasise that the Bill will give them greater powers and greater flexibility. Governments are often criticised for doing things that seem to harm local authorities and their powers. That is not true, but it is often alleged. This small measure will underline the fact that we believe strongly in giving local authorities powers where appropriate and where we believe that they can operate them effectively and efficiently.

It may be helpful if I give the House a little background to the Bill. Many hon. Members have referred to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which enables local authorities to designate parking places on highways in their areas and to provide off-street car parks. The Act places a duty on authorities to exercise their powers and to secure, among other things, the provision of suitable and adequate parking facilities both on and off the highway. That general duty applies to all vehicles, not just to motor cars. Local authorities must take into account the need to maintain reasonable access to premises, the safety and convenience of the motoring public and other matters including—I emphasise this—preserving local amenity.

Interestingly, although some people would think otherwise, local authorities remain the largest collective providers of off-street car parking in the country, though, clearly, there is increasing scope for involvement by the private sector. Many authorities choose to have a form of unmanned pay-and-display arrangement which puts the motorist on trust to purchase a ticket when he arrives and makes him liable to an extra charge if he fails to pay or if he overstays his time.

The method for enforcing such arrangements is provided by means of parking place orders made by the local authority under the 1984 Act. Breaching the provisions of an order constitutes an offence. Indications displayed by parking equipment can be used as evidence in criminal proceedings. The 1984 Act therefore requires parking equipment and the parking devices associated with such equipment to be approved by the Secretary of State. That well-established procedure goes back to the first parking meters in this country. Obviously, it offers a safeguard to the public and ensures that the equipment meets certain minimum standards. That is important, because, I am informed, British standards are being developed as a basis for streamlining the approval process. Clearly, the British standards must be applied to all new parking devices and equipment that might be introduced as a result of my Bill.

That is the background, but why is the Bill needed? Until recently, the Secretary of State could approve the use of coin-operated equipment only. Many people will be somewhat incredulous of the fact that they can use only coin-operated equipment in the late 1980s. The original provisions were drafted before any alternative systems were available, and technology is advancing in this as in other areas. In 1986, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) successfully introduced the Road Traffic Regulation (Parking) Act 1986 to allow non coin-operated parking equipment to be approved for use on the street. That extended what had been a London-only provision to apply nationally. It certainly opened up the way for a range of cashless equipment, which includes prepaid tokens, vouchers, magnetic cards and electronic in-car devices.

My Bill will build on that in two specific ways. First, it will allow the Secretary of State to approve for use in off-street car parks the same types of equipment that can now be used legally on the street. Secondly, it anticipates and provides for the introduction of parking equipment on or off street that can accept bank notes and credit and debit cards. While I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North on what he did, the new provision gives manufacturers with such equipment the opportunity to take advantage of the market that will become available and to extend their work in developing new parking devices.

12 noon

The second provision is essentially a logical development of the first. It is wrong that we should provide for other cashless forms of payment without also widening the current definition to include bank notes and credit and debit cards, as well as coins. That, of course, assumes that parking equipment and control mechanisms develop in the same direction as those for the payment of other goods and services, which we now enjoy in retail outlets throughout the country. I am trying to ensure that my Bill does not get overtaken quickly by technological progress.

The Bill was further improved in Committee. When I was talking about the speed of the legislation, I mentioned that we carefully considered the Bill's four clauses in Committee. In particular, there is now provided in clause 1(3) a power to allow the Secretary of State to amend the definition of a parking device. That is shorthand for any method of paying for parking by prepayment rather than by a coin in the slot. The definition of a parking device is fairly comprehensive, but there is a possibility that technological advances will produce some further variants. We certainly do not want to have primary legislation in the House every time that happens. The amendments, which cover both on and off-street parking, would allow the Secretary of State by order to extend the categories of parking device that local authorities may be permitted to employ.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) referred to the unfortunately large number of imported vehicles. I can tell him that the export potential of manufacturers with this new technology and new parking devices appears to be enormous. They would do well to follow up the opportunity that they are given through my legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) has rightly drawn attention in new clause 1 to the problem of coaches parking on the streets. I do not wish to dispute his facts—I am not able to do so—but clearly my hon. Friend the Minister may wish to do so. As the Minister's constituency is not that far from Lewisham, the particular problems to which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West referred may also be problems for the Minister. I emphasise that my legislation is of course—with the sad exception of Northern Ireland—national. While the debate on London problems has been most

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

illuminating to me as a northern Member of Parliament, I found that some of the matters discussed were not completely relevant. If they were allowed to proceed, they would probably muddy the waters. They would certainly diminish the impact of the Bill as a small but national piece of legislation.

I hazard a guess that the main problem concerned in new clause 1 is not that caused by coaches parking at designated bays, but that of coaches parking haphazardly or even illegally in other places. Obviously, we would all like to move the problem off the street, but the passengers who use buses and coaches may not be so happy. That may, of course, be the basis of another debate.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend touched on an important point. We cannot have a situation where we pass legislation in the House, or leave the police to administer the law, and then say to the police "Nudge, nudge, wink, wink, we know that they are breaking the law, but if you enforce the law, you will inconvenience a few people." Will my hon. Friend confirm that he agrees that that is a completely unacceptable proposition?

Mr. Kirkhope: I agree with my hon. Friend. He was right to mention that point. I am not trying to come down one way or the other, but am merely pointing out what I believe could be genuine difficulties in pursuing new clause 1. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will have more to say on that issue. He is better equipped than I am to remark further on it. However, I thought it right that I should make my views known at this stage.

A decent off-street coach park is expensive to provide, especially in London. Parking is, of course, expensive and taking up the space of a lot of our cities is an expensive operation. It is certainly known that there is little suitable land available for off-street parking in the capital. High land prices tend to rule it out as an easy option, because it is unlikely that a reasonable return could be made on the investment. That is one argument, but there are those who could argue effectively the other way. On that basis, parking charges would have to be high. However, if they were too high, they would obviously drive away customers. It could be argued that that is what we need to do. My hon. Friend the Minister for Lewisham, West suggested that it would be a good idea, especially in London, to drive away some of the customers. It may be the time to consider not allowing so many of these vehicles and their occupants to come here. All round, the argument is for designating a limited number of coach parking places in the areas that need them most, but not elsewhere. Perhaps we should be a little more rigid on that.

I am not sure that the proposed new clause will help the progress of the Bill. However, it is right that it has been proposed. Perhaps it will be useful for the clause to be incorporated in some future legislation that may be more appropriate to it. I should be interested to hear the views of the Minister, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West will not press the new clause.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West for his remarks on new clause 3, but I am still in doubt about what that clause would achieve. My understanding is that the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 allows local authorities to restrict resident parking places to any class of vehicle that they choose. Some residents may choose to drive a car and some may choose to drive a small minibus or van that occupies the same space as a car. Of course, there are widespread permit schemes for residents, which I believe have been generally accepted. I am not aware of any real pressure to discriminate. I question whether it is a good thing to be more restrictive than we are now. We have not taken account, for instance, of residents' motor cycles. What about areas of mixed residential and business use, where there are bound to be some vans and lorries needing space? I am not saying that it would be always right for them to take up residents' space, but I feel that the matter might best be left to the discretion of the local authorities, which take into account local feeling, rather than being legislated for in this manner.

New clause 4 perhaps raises similar issues to the previous new clause. There are flexible provisions in the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 for restrictions on waiting and loading by all kinds of goods vehicles. Those restrictions may apply throughout the day or for any part of the day. Those powers are extensively used already. They may not always, of course, be well enforced, but that is another issue. It is certainly not something that we can put right here and now. I am all for restricting peak hour deliveries, but, if the will is there, that can be achieved under the present law.

New clause 4 would tie the hands of the local authorities unduly. We should be thinking more about giving highway authorities more discretion in parking matters rather than less. Again, it is a matter of retaining as much flexibility in the law as possible. I hope that that my hon. Friend will not press new clause 4.

New clause 5 is, I believe, returning to the theme of new clause 1. It would impose a new duty on local authorities or it would be a more specific variation of their existing general duties to which I referred earlier. Local authorities are already obliged to secure suitable parking provision not just for cars, but for all kinds of vehicles. It does not mean, of course, that they always must provide it themselves at the ratepayers' expense. My hon. Friend the Minister may wish to correct me, but I imagine that, if anyone should be responsible for providing off-street coach and bus parks, it should be the bus and coach operators themselves, if that is possible to achieve.

If I understand the situation correctly, local authorities already have the power to build and operate bus and coach stations and many do so. The need varies from place to place and therefore I am not sure that it would be appropriate to impose a duty on every local authority to provide off-street parking for coaches and buses, especially if it was not required. That extra burden would lead to rigidity rather than flexibility. The power should be given to the local people through their elected representatives.

New clause 7, which is proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, contains an interesting suggestion. Even though it raises important issues to which the Minister should address himself, I am not sure whether it is within the scope of my Bill. I would, however, be interested to learn the Minister's reaction to it. My initial reaction is that the new clause proposes a radical approach that carries a severe penalty. It would have to be considered carefully before it was accepted. I look forward to what the Minister has to say and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch for raising the matter.

Mr. Prescott: I can hardly believe that my luck has changed. First, may I apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) who has been invited to attend the Guildhall lunch with Mr. Gorbachev. She will be dealing with broader and more strategic matters while I am left to deal with London parking—so be our allotted roles. Given my hon. Friend's background, I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate that I was only too willing to help to ensure that she attended that lunch.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) on his Bill. I must admit that when the hon. Gentleman was discussing the new clauses that have been tabled by the hon. Members for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) I got the impression that he was more concerned about his Bill than the arguments put by his colleagues. The Bill enjoys support from both sides of the House and deals with an important matter. Although the arguments put by his hon. Friends were strong, I appreciate that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East does not want to take controversial baggage on board as the Government might then feel that they could not accept the Bill.

It is somewhat surprising that this important measure has been introduced as a private Member's Bill. It is the role of Government to provide time to introduce such measures. I notice that the Government have said that they cannot find time for such measures, although they welcome their introduction by others. It is funny that the Government could find time, within about 24 hours, to make a statement about the dock labour scheme. There were no problems there and that statement will affect thousands of dockers. I will not go into that matter now, but it demonstrates that the Government have plenty of time to deal with any piece of legislation if they so wish.

The unique claim on behalf of the Bill is that we are all winners and there are no losers. It is important to judge this Bill, however, against the comprehensive problem of parking. Every speaker has said that one cannot simply solve this growing problem of parking by providing better car parking space or computers to deal with paying the parking fees. Parking is a major problem facing urban communities. I often visit Leeds and Yorkshire—I am told that I now live in Humberside, but that is another matter and I will leave it aside—and Leeds suffers from similar problems with lorries and coaches as those in London. Parking is a national problem.

The Government should have provided time for this Bill and, having studied the business statement for next week, I should have thought that that was possible. Legislation could also be introduced as a result of the North report, which is being produced by the other place. The measures in the Bill could, therefore, have been included in other legislation, but it is important to judge the Bill on its own merits. I wish it well, and I hope that it goes through all its stages today.

The arguments advanced by the hon. Members for Christchurch and for Lewisham, West are worthy of support. The hon. Member for Christchurch and I have had more than two exchanges on transport and other issues, but I hope that he will not be embarrassed if I say that I support the arguments he advanced today.

12.15 pm

The deregulation of buses has added to the problems. More inter-city buses now operate on the motorways and people exercise their right to choose a cheaper way to travel to London. Buses are cheaper than trains, but that gets us on to the question of fair prices and all sorts of other things. Anybody who is familiar with Westminster and Victoria is well aware of the problems caused by coaches. This morning, as I passed Parliament square, I noted two Italian coaches parked on the square. That is one of the major routes out to the motorways and that incident illustrates the problems associated with parking, in many cases illegal parking. Those problems will not be solved by more technically efficient means of payment for parking.

We must deal with the tremendous input of cars, coaches and buses into our city. That problem will demand that we challenge one of the basic philosophies of the Tory party. The Secretary of State has expressed that philosophy on a number of occasions, even at the Tory party conference. It is claimed that the ownership of the car is the greatest expression of individual freedom. The idea is that people may use their cars for wherever they want to go and that we should try to meet the demands of all those with cars. Even though we have a lower proportion of car ownership in comparison with most other European countries, we cannot continue to build more and more roads and more and more car parks to meet that demand.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, West was right when he said that we should try to manage the existing system much better. I am rather sceptical about the auto-glide system, which we shall discuss shortly. I know that that system does more than tell people where the empty road is, but when I have travelled round London, in all forms of transport, I have always found it difficult to find any empty roads. The M25 is certainly not an empty road.

The Bill has a contribution to make, but we need a much more radical approach. One of the Government's major mistakes is to assume that we can deal with this matter in a departmental manner. I am not laying that charge against this Government alone as the problem has been with us for some time. Colin Buchanan told us more than 20 years ago that we would have to do something about organising traffic in our cities. The choices facing us are whether to ban cars in certain areas or to offer better opportunities for public transport.

The hon. Members for Christchurch and for Lewisham, West were right when they said that we need more public money to fund the public transport system. We cannot allow market prices to determine future developments in public transport. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West was careful not to speak about a subsidy, but that is precisely what we are talking about. Public money must be made available so that choice may be affected.

I remember the arguments advanced by the Greater London council about its "Fares Fair" policy. Whatever the controversy about that policy—I supported it—it led to more people transferring to public transport and fewer people using their cars. It also reduced the number of accidents on our roads. In that regard I must give credit to the Government, and particularly to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, for their efforts to reduce road accidents. The Minister is right to be proud of his record. He is aware that the record for pedestrians is not as good and that we need to do a lot more. We welcome the

[Mr. Prescott]

improvements that have been made and, although I have not said it before, I would like to put it on record that the present safety record is something of which he should be proud. If we save lives, in whatever way, it is a matter for congratulation. Let us hope that we can do more about that.

The Bill also deals with safety to an extent, but it relates mainly to cars. Its main concern is how to pay for those cars once they arrive in the city. We are, after all, in a cashless society. I should have liked to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) who brought in the original legislation. I do not know whether hon. Members know, but my hon. Friend has been ill for a time and I am sure that all of us would want to pass on our best wishes, particularly today, when we are following on from his legislation. It was clear that, as the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East said, the legislation was not comprehensive enough and much of the machinery on street parking that it was suggested should be introduced was not introduced because the manufacturers thought that there was not a big enough market and that this would provide them with greater opportunities.

If we are to deal with the problem in our urban cities, we must recognise that there are too many cars and we cannot merely pursue the policy of providing more car parks. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made an interesting point. He was really talking about a park-and-ride system, but it was being used by people taking the Underground to the unfortunate disadvantage of people in the area. Those people were denied the very local car parks that they want for business and shops in their areas, because other people were doing something which we would encourage them to do—using the car park because they could not get into the inner city and it is quicker to use public transport.

The combination of park and ride—of public and private transport—is one way forward. We must realise that cars will stay and play an important part in the transport system. They will not go away; we cannot eliminate them. We should consider how we can ration their use within cities.

Another interesting point is whether we should impose more severe penalties on motorists who park illegally. In London there are problems for ambulances and fire services in gaining access to some of our streets. They are held up because cars are illegally parked. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) suggested that the best way to deter such motorists was to increase fines. That may well have happened to a certain extent. The evidence obtained from the use of the clamp tends to suggest that.

However, the clamp brings the worst of both worlds. It makes it inconvenient for motorists who have parked illegally because the clamped car stays in the road much longer, but, because it does so, the congestion continues for much longer. It deters the motorist from repeating his offence. However, many people who use company cars or who are self-employed and use cars for business seem to think that the only way to operate is to park illegally. A parking fine becomes a business fine—almost a business charge. Even if the fine is £50 or £10, it can be passed on, or one can pay by credit card—they have already arrived in the cashless illegal parking system. Credit cards or cheques are used to pay the fine.

We must think more seriously about the penalties to show our displeasure about motorists who park illegally and the way that they are putting so many people at a disadvantage. We may well have to put point endorsements on licences for parking offences. Often when I talk to drivers in business they say that their company boss has said "You must wait there" or "You must deliver this package and if you get a fine I will pay it". If the driver was then able to say "But it is my licence that will be endorsed, not yours," he would have some defence against the businesses which pressure their employees to park illegally to carry out business. Illegal parking is causing considerable problems in our cities, and we may have to consider taking such action to control the car within the community.

Hon. Members have also mentioned environmental problems. The Minister is well aware of the more controversial London assessment road programmes. History has shown that whichever Ministers come along with watever ideas people find them controversial and they oppose them. Much of the opposition to the Bill is because the local authorities which used to deal with the roads programmes and the GLC contribution have been done away with. The London assessment programmes are not assessed against a public transport system. It is not considered what could best be done to achieve the best contribution from public transport—whether eliminating the obstacles in the bus lane, or providing a cheaper fare system so that people use public transport. The GLC, in what was largely a successful transport policy, was trying to achieve all that. Even the lorry bans were introduced by the GLC. There must be a comprehensive approach to the problems in the urban city.

Even the CBI is now calling for planning and one supreme body, which is remarkable from an organisation that professes to believe mainly in market forces. However, market forces cannot solve the transport problems in our cities. We must have a major contribution from public transport but the Government appear to have set their face against that; they are against public transport systems. However, there will be opportunities next week to debate that.

However, the Government are on the wrong side of the argument and are the only Government probably in western Europe who cannot see a role for intervention and planning in integrating the transport systems, even the fare systems. One question posed today is, where will the money be found for the systems? People say that it should come not from the ratepayer but from the user. However, the taxpayer has a role to play. Every other developed economy believes that the taxpayer must make a greater contribution.

No Government has had a hypothecation policy of using all money raised in that way. However, every other European country spends about 50 per cent. of the road tax raised on roads and transportation. In this country, in 1979, 35 per cent. was spent and now it is 25 per cent. It is not that, in this country the same share of road tax has not been spent on roads, but we have given more and more of the money to the Treasury. The money has not gone into any other form of transportation—whether public passenger revenue support or building more roads. We are spending less as a proportion and less in absolute terms

—in case the Minister asks for a comparasion of the two Government records. That is an argument for another time.

There is much to be said for using more of the money raised in road transport taxation, not just on roads but on transport generally and for considering more radical ways of raising transportation tax and how we spend it.

The M25 has at least relieved some of the through traffic. Before London had a circular road around its centre it must have been unique amongst capital cities. A number of political parties were involved and they each must share the political blame. What we have at present is quite inadequate. Although I understand that we cannot have—and would not want—five or six motorways through our cities and must do more to rationalise our use of space within the city areas, we must have a much more effective means of moving around our cities, particularly with the advent of the Channel tunnel, which will have a major effect on transport flows in this country.

All these factors show that many of the Government's present policies—their central rail study, the Channel tunnel and London road assessments—are dealt with separately, instead of being seen as contributions to a whole, as is the case abroad. To do so Government must have an active role and intervene and plan. It is tragic that such language is the language of ideological difference in this country. The hon. Member for Christchurch made that point. There must be other ways of making rational decisions rather than leaving it to the price and the market.

In any civilised developed economy transport must play its part. It is no coincidence that transport is a much more politically sensitive issue now than it was 10 years ago. That is not solely due to recent terrible tragedies; it is because it involves people's daily experience of being stuck on the M25 or being unable to find car park space in a town, or having to pay fines.

Our main criticism of the Government's approach is their lack of an overall transport policy. Nevertheless, I offer my congratulations again to the Bill's promoter and my support on behalf of the Opposition for the Bill. It is a sensible Bill, worthy of our support. I hope that it will be supported generally and that the Government will accept the amendments to it, if not today, then eventually. These problems must be dealt with if we are to solve the problems of transport by car in our urban areas.

12.30 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I join previous speakers in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope). There was a time when many would have bet that no private Member's Bill would have reached this stage, but my hon. Friend's quick reactions got the Bill through Second Reading. There was a good debate in Committee—perhaps more closely related to the Bill than some of the issues raised by the new clauses discussed today, but that is understandable.

A word of caution to my hon. Friend. I have been conscious during proceedings on other private Member's Bills to which I have responded for the Government in the past two or three years that just one hon. Member has been able to try to force an amendment or block a Bill. That is what happened last year to the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), a measure dealing with child restraints in cars. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) here. Northern Ireland was included at the suggestion of an hon. Member from Northern Ireland. The year before that saw the passage of the Adley Act—if I may call it that. It did much to reduce the terrible noise pollution from motorcycles, which can do more to ruin the lives of people than even coaches. I am sure that many are grateful to him for the priority that he gave to that issue at that time.

I hope that my hon. Friend's Bill makes further progress. I do not intend to speak for long as I know that other important Bills await discussion. The next to come up may not be controversial, but it will be important to some people, and the House has an obligation to small as well as large numbers of people.

My problems is that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has made the speech for which we have waited for two and half years, so I can get rid of my response to the speech that I thought that he was going to make. When and if I appear shortly on "Any Questions" I shall be able to report to Carol Stone that the hon. Gentleman's New Year resolution, announced on "Any Questions" two years ago, to avoid shouting, has now been fulfilled. If he stands again for deputy leader of the Labour party I am sure he will be successful. He is certainly more active than its present deputy leader. I had better stop exchanging compliments before I get into trouble——

Madam Deputy Speaker: That would be a good idea.

Mr. Bottomley: What we are really discussing is whether store cards, credit cards and even kidney donor cards can be used to pay for parking in an off-street parking place. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said, we understand the absence of his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) who, in 1986, brought forward a similar group of measures. Had anyone guessed then that our legal friends would say that one cannot be certain whether the same equipment authorised for on-street parking will be lawful for off-street parking, the previous legislation might have been more comprehensive. Today's debate is an important use of private Member's time and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East on that.

We shall return to the subject of small coaches next Tuesday night when discussing European driver licencing, and to general traffic arrangements which, I am sure, will be able to be debated on the Second Reading of next Thursday's legislation. I want to make plain the Secretary of State's and my position on motorways in London. We do not intend to put forward motorway proposals. As the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) said, there are reasons for considering new roads. He served in Fulham and in what is now the borough of Wandsworth. As I said in an earlier intervention, Wandsworth Council has promoted—and, I have no doubt, will promote in future —road schemes of advantage to local people. They will need to be considered in terms of their wider impact, but I do not believe that Wandsworth or any other London borough or the Department of Transport will promote a road that will be a substitute for the M25 for crossing London.

I have made this point almost so often that it bores me silly to repeat it. It is not our aim to spend public money on building roads to encourage people to give up their rail season tickets and get into their one-tonne motor cars——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It is hard to see what this has to do with the new clauses.

Mr. Bottomley: Perhaps I can make myself plain by referring to page 59 of the Forshaw and Abercrombie report of 1943, which referred to people who drive their cars into theatreland. Messrs. Forshaw and Abercrombie recommended that there should be 7,000 car parking spaces for vehicles in the West End theatreland alone. My aim, even if it upsets my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) is to ensure that such people will come in by coach from the railway terminus, go to the theatre, and then use the railways to go home.

Nothing I have done or said in more than three years as Minister for white lines and potholes should give anyone the idea that we will try to build motorways in London —or on radial routes in and out from the centre—which will only increase car commuting. We are not trying to do that and have said so. I would be grateful if Mr. Nick Lester of the Association of London Authorities, and others who produce resident groups leaflets describing half mile wide motorways covering most of London, would stop doing so. Could they please desist.

I should like to give some advice to Thames Television which spends some time covering parking provision and other road issues in London. Instead of quick responses and asking the Minister to make a comment when somebody else has grabbed the microphone, Thames Television should occasionally read our leaflets or listen to our speeches. We have issued publications called "Transport in London" and "Statement on Transport in London". Why does it not heed the rather good speech that I made on Tuesday in Brighton at the Traffex exhibition? It was called "Civilising the Motor Car."

There are many opportunities for media people to listen to what we say. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has said, we ought to take some of the party politics out of this. There are always local issues and in that context I pay tribute to the societies and associations who pay attention to them. I had a meeting only last night with the Eltham society about various considerations in the borough of Greenwich. But we must make sure that we do not say that we must never build any more roads in London. There are too many casualties and too much of an environmental impact because of present traffic arrangements. In many areas of London new jobs need to be created. When people from the boroughs come to see me about parking or other traffic problems I advise them to seek advice from their officers about how many casualties they have and where they occur, on the rat runs as well as on the main roads. I advise them to bring in a map showing which households are affected by through traffic.

We must start talking positively rather than just slipping back into the mistakes that have been made over the last 100 years. The whole history of parking in London is covered in the Gibbon and Bell book called "The History of London County Council—1889-1939" and in the follow up edition. If we look at those, or at the Bressey report of 1938, or at Forshaw and Abercrombie we see that it is a case of people taking short-term decisions to do nothing without taking account of the impact on others. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said, that kind of approach does not work in other forms of transport and will not work on the roads.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East for his remarks about reducing casualties. However, we have not gone nearly far enough. I suspect that when the account for 1988 comes forward the casualties will amount to about 5,000. The target is not just to get below 5,000 a year. Over the last 14 years casualties have been reduced by about 1,500 a year, but we have to reduce the figure of 100 lives per week being lost on the roads to 80 then to 60 and then to 40. Two thirds of deaths and injuries on the roads are unnecessary.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) is with me on the Front Bench. Perhaps I should seek to work as his junior because the Northern Ireland figures used to be better than those in Great Britain, but now they are not so good. We have heard about parking problems in Belfast as well as about those in the rest of Britain. We must seriously consider the new clauses, and I would do that at great length if we did not have other pressing business before the House.

Coach parking is an emotive problem and there are no easy solutions. I sympathise with people on both sides of the argument. In his ninth Nicholas Bacon memorial lecture John Julius Norwich talked about tourist pollution. He said that it was possible to destroy the things that we are trying to see and appreciate if too many people come in. He was referring to the hundreds of coaches going to Florence and to the outskirts of Venice. We see the same thing around Westminster.

There are problems to be faced, but they cannot be faced effectively by blanket new clauses which would ban coaches that do not have designated parking spaces. It would be imprudent to adopt the alternative new clause which says that parking spaces should not be designated. There is a great conflict between two of the new clauses that we are debating. We must recognise that the Bus and Coach Council is trying but has not yet succeeded.— *[Interruption.]* Perhaps when my hon. Friend's birthday next comes around we will send him a letter or arrange for a parliamentary question.

As a non-sponsored member of the Transport and General Workers Union, I do not want to see too much unjustified criticism of drivers who face difficult problems when they have to drop people at the right place at the right time, pick them up at the right place at the right time and must also find time to take a break and leave the coach if it is not being used. The same problems apply with buses.

Buses and coaches provide a valuable service for the public and since deregulation they have provided alternative provision for customers. Put another way, they may be regarded as extra competition for British Rail because, unlike the railways, buses and coaches do not require expensive infrastructure for which they must pay themselves. They share infrastructure which is provided at great expense.

Do coaches use the existing road space efficiently? The answer must be yes. However, in terms of parking the answer is no. A parked coach takes up the space of three cars. However, a coach carrying 50 people is saving a great deal of road space in terms of the number of cars on the road.

There is a particular problem in London and the Metropolitan police are stepping up their efforts against illegal parking. I understand that the police have been in touch with the Bus and Coach Council to enlist its support.

Local authorities already have discretion about the vehicles that they allow to use designated parking spaces. Coach meters are not numerous, but they exist. We would like to see more in central London. The City of Westminster council has already introduced card-operated machines on the streets and that has been made possible more generally since the Road Traffic Regulation (Parking) Act 1986. Designated spaces are better than unrestricted coach parking. Clamping and towing have had some impact on yellow line parking. They may delay a car an extra hour or two, but research from the Transport and Road and Research Laboratory shows that they cut illegal parking by 30 or 40 per cent.

Mr. Adley: I would like a ministerial reply to a narrow point. We know that the Metropolitan police have described the problems of illegal parking as horrendous. What is the Government's position if coaches are parking illegally? We know that the police are short of resources, and the police believe that the coach is causing a major traffic problem, but they are worried about enforcing the law because of the inconvenience to passengers. Will my hon. Friend the Minister make it clear that the Government expect the police to enforce the law regardless of inconvenience? Only in that way will coaches stop acting illegally.

Mr. Bottomley: I fear that I may have to disappoint my hon. Friend. Part of my work involves proposing legislation and I try to avoid saying what the police should do. The law is there to be observed. That is plain. If there is supposed to be discretion in obeying the law, that should be written into legislation. However, most of us would expect to see a degree of common sense in terms of enforcing the law, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) explained in relation to his parking circumstances. In areas like drink driving, I have held back from saying anything about the way in which the police should use their discretion. If my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch will allow me, I prefer to maintain my degree of discretion today.

There are problems with designation. In a wide-ranging and very important speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West, like my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), put into context the problems facing travellers and residents. We must consider residents as well.

If we said that a local authority could not allow a resident to park a van in a resident's parking space—that is an implication in the new clause—we would be going too far. However, we can expect more local authorities to be as rigorous as some authorities in central London have been recently in checking to discover why so many people with residents' parking permits use that permit at 8.30 am and stop using it at 5.30 pm because they drive away elsewhere. Local authorities have power to deal with that type of cheating.

Our economic life requires service vehicles. I am not referring here to residents parking, but to road use. More people should read the articles which have been published in *The Times* about the time that is wasted in trying to make deliveries during the commuter rush hour. Many of the firms that contributed to the Confederation of British Industry's interesting report on London traffic congestion should consider whether they can stagger their deliveries to avoid the main commuting rush, especially in outer London. I do not think that there is a solution for central London, because in central London there is often more traffic during the day than there is in the morning and afternoon commuter periods.

12.45 pm

I hope that my remarks illustrate that the Government are continuing to examine the issues raised on other occasions by my right hon. and hon. Friends. However, it would be inappropriate to load the Bill with the new clauses proposed.

As to new clause 5, the duty on local authorities themselves to make provision for off-street parking would cut away from some of the initiatives we have been encouraging, in requiring local authorities more often to use private sector resources. I do not want to see a return to the old cycle that we had in London especially, whereby for 10 years one was not allowed to construct a building unless it included plenty of parking provision, followed by 10 years of saying that new buildings could not incorporate any parking provision—with the Government trying to set themselves against the market and swinging from one extreme to another, rather like the pendulum in the Science museum. It may be better to allow a mixture of self-interest and planning guidance, rather than to go for an absolute solution.

There has been congestion in London since Roman times, and as we shall not find a solution to parking or to traffic movement, we should try to move to a sensible position. Today, I think that it is sensible to have off-street parking that is paid for by cashless means, mainly by stored value or by credit cards.

It should not be assumed that all local authorities are confronted with a serious parking problem, though that may be true of London, of other city centres, and of some historic towns. I look forward to attending the historic towns forum that is to take place in two or three weeks' time. However, I may wish to return early, so that I may be negatively neutral on the Right of Reply Bill. Given my job, if I had a formal right of reply, half the newspapers would be full of items explaining that they had misunderstood me. I am one of the more misunderstood Ministers, in the same way that the hon. Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East is frequently misunderstood.

I move on past new clause 6, which is not being debated, to new clause 7. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch is right to say that coach parking is a serious problem. I do not want to hold out a false prospect of accepting new clause 7 at a later stage of the Bill or of having it adopted in other Government legislation. I should like to give it further consideration and will write to my hon. Friend about detailed points and the difficulties as we see them. That is not meant as a false promise so that my hon. Friend will not press his new clause today, but I fear that if he did so, we might lose the whole Bill—and that would be a major loss. It is only by the kind of persistence shown by my hon. Friend that we shall move towards partial solutions to very real problems.

London has a population of about 7 million people, in addition to those who commute to London to work. That population is equivalent to that of Austria and twice that of Singapore. To believe that we can destroy economic activity so that traffic may move easily, or that we can impose the kind of solution adopted by Singapore, whereby a car has only eight years' life, would be foolish.

[Mr. Bottomley]

We have a duty to improve London's environment and prosperity, and to make certain that the casualties of traffic congestion are reduced. Off-street parking is part of that.

I shall be grateful if the House will not agree to the new clauses that have been proposed in a helpful way today, but will let the Bill as it came from Committee go forward to another place. Perhaps we may then consider other problems in the debates that we are likely to have on traffic in London, use of the motor car, and designated parking.

Mr. Maples: I am grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister, who recognises that the problems mentioned by myself and by other hon. Members are integrated and that the solutions to them must encompass various forms of transport and of parking regulation. I feel sure that we shall return to the subject many times. In view of my hon. Friend's comments, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

12.49 pm

Mr. Kirkhope: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I do not intend to detain the House for more than a moment. I have already explained the purpose of the Bill, and its detailed provisions were considered fully in Committee. I am grateful both to the hon. Members who participated in that process and to those who have contributed so constructively to today's debate. I am also grateful to the Minister and his officials for their kind assistance during the conduct of the legislation so far.

This is not a party political matter, and I am particularly grateful to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who made some very helpful remarks. The Opposition clearly recognise that, although modest, this is a worthy piece of legislation. Many people stand to gain from it, including local authorities, equipment manufacturers and, perhaps especially, motorists.

It may seem odd that we must resort to primary legislation to give local authorities more scope and flexibility in this regard. The truth is that the present law is outdated; technology has marched ahead while statute as dragged behind. We have the opportunity to put that right, and to establish a firm footing for future progress.

As I have said, the Bill is modest, but I believe that it is worthwhile. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to bring it forward, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Bill

As amended, considered

Order for Third Reading read.

12.51 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

If you had been in the Chair earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might have understood what was going through my mind during the humorous speech of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). When casting light on the subject of the preceding Bill, the hon. Gentleman encouraged us all to remain until later this afternoon to meet another Minister. My mind went back to a political gathering. It was late in the evening and the speaker was roaring on. The chairman was present, along with one other person. The speaker said, "Mr. Chairman, I am deeply indebted to my friend for remaining to the end", to which the response was "Friend my eye, I am the next speaker."

I sat through the previous debate on the important subject of parking as it affects London, in particular, but also the nation as a whole. I appreciated the Minister's reference to the upsurge in casualties on the roads in Northern Ireland. I speak today out of concern for both disabled people and those who care for them. Let me put on record my indebtedness to right hon. and hon. Members throughout the House who have supported me, and pay tribute to the helpful guidance I received from the Minister and the Department when I sought to discuss with them the implications of the Disabled Persons Services, Consultation and Representation Act 1986 as it affected Northern Ireland.

It was mooted at that time, both in Committee and in the other place, that the measure should be extended to Northern Ireland, but, because of the administrative arrangements for health and social services in Northern Ireland, that was set aside. Nevertheless, as I was successful in the ballot for private Member's Bills, I decided to introduce this Bill which I hope will become an Act during the Session. It will give the people of Northern Ireland the same disability rights as those enjoyed in the rest of the United Kingdom. The people of Northern Ireland avidly await the implementation of the Bill's provisions. Councils throughout the Province support the Bill. The Law Society for Northern Ireland also supports it, as do the various organisations that help the disabled. I pay tribute to Mencap and the Act Now campaign who have helped me to frame the Bill.

When I drafted the Bill I sought to make it apply to Northern Ireland in the same way as the 1986 Act applies to the rest of the United Kingdom. That meant that it had to contain provisions relating to local authorities and housing. The 1986 Act places an onus on local authorities. I did not proceed with the drafting of a Bill along those lines because there had been insufficient time for consultation with everybody in Northern Ireland. Discussions subsequently took place and the Department encouraged me to table amendments to bring this Bill into line with the 1986 Act. The changes place an onus on local councils and on the Department of the Environment—through the Northern Ireland Housing Executive—to deal with disabled people in the same way as they are dealt with in the rest of Great Britain.

A few minor amendments were made in Committee. We originally used the words "a mental health commission." However, there is only one mental health commission in Northern Ireland. I am not a supporter of quangos and I do not want to encourage the Department to create another one. Therefore I was happy to change the wording to "the" mental health commission. Muckamore Abbey is under the control of the Eastern board although it is within the area of the Northern board. That was another consequential amendment.

I urge the House to pass the Bill. We are three years behind the parent Bill that was skilfully piloted through the House by the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke). I am happy that he is a sponsor of my Bill.

The Bill has financial implications. As I am a Unionist, I do not want for Northern Ireland what is not available to the rest of the United Kingdom. I was encouraged by the Minister's positive response in Committee. I know that he will use his best efforts to encourage the various boards and agencies to implement the Act in Northern Ireland. When budgeting for Northern Ireland we have to recognise that a sign of a caring society and of a caring nation is its care for the disabled. If there is a financial surplus, I hope that part of it will be released for this purpose. It ought not to be stored up for other purposes. It should be used to help those who are in real need.

The main purpose of the Bill is to improve arrangements for advocacy and representation. People in Northern Ireland look forward to having a legal right of advocacy so that those who cannot argue the case for themselves and who do not know their way round the system may have somebody to speak for them. The Bill will certainly do away with the present system under which a child may ultimately have to appeal against the health and social services board that is responsible for him or her. Quite apart from financial resources, the Bill gives those children the right to be represented by an advocate who will look after their interests.

In Committee I was asked about the respective ratios of disabled people in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain. We have had difficulty in finding up-to-date and accurate statistics, but we can make comparisons nevertheless. The incidence of Down's syndrome, for example, is one in 600 live births in Northern Ireland as compared with one in 1,000 live births in the United Kingdom as a whole. I am never convinced that such statistics are accurate. How can we tell the proportion if we do not know the total incidence? Those are the figures that are used, however, and they show a disproportionate need in Northern Ireland.

People have asked what causes the difference. In Committee the Minister drew attention to morbidity and to the problem of larger families and of mothers of advanced years bearing children as possible contributory factors.

Another factor has been mentioned. I am not sure that it is a cause of the problem and we should draw attention to it if only to challenge it. The scare stories that some have put around excite fear in people rather than seeking to deal with the problem. Dr. Sheehan from Dublin, who conducted a study of the incidence of Down's disease in Dundalk and other southern areas, claimed that Sellafield was a cause. Professor Lowry challenged that assumption in a later report. Perhaps I am partial because Professor Lowry and I were colleagues at school, but I found his study more objective than the study that claimed Sellafield as a cause. He cast doubt on Dr. Sheehan's theory and showed that the evidence was inconclusive.

We must still ask why the ratio is higher in Northern Ireland and hope to discover a means to eliminate the disease. The Down's Association has said that the new education system in Northern Ireland benefits the children as it makes a better use of their talents. The association expresses a worry that is shared by others—that when the children reach the age of 19 and have to leave school, provision for them is not adequate. I welcome some of the moves made to improve that situation. At least the Bill puts responsibility on departments and boards to be more accurate in their assessments and provide the necessary support.

The number of discharges from hospital has been mentioned. It was interesting to discover that although there has been a decline in the number of beds in mental hospitals recently, there has also been an increase in the number of admissions. Therefore, the Bill is timely. I trust that the support of right hon. and hon. Members will speed it on its way to the other place, ultimately to become an Act for the well-being of our people in Northern Ireland.

1.4 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on extending the provisions of the existing legislation to Northern Ireland. He and everybody else in Northern Ireland consider that it is long overdue.

One of my principal concerns is about the problems of carers, as distinct from the obvious problems that affect disabled people. I was pleased to see that clause 8 is about the duty of the board to take into account the abilities of carers. From my own experience and from my Front-Bench responsibilities, which I am not exercising now, I know that when we consider the problems that many women face, we do not always look at people's ability to look after someone within their family. They do the job willingly and lovingly, and would not necessarily want anybody to take it from them, but we do not sufficiently recognise that they need great support. As hon. Members will know, the overwhelming majority of carers are women. They range across the age spectrum. They could be children, young women, middle-aged women who have had to give up their jobs, or pensioners looking after another pensioner or even a younger person. It is generally recognised that it is their role to look after somebody, simply because he or she happens to be a member of the same family. That causes some resentment and problems. If society, the authorities, agencies and, in this case, the board recognise that people in that position need maximum support, the hon. Gentleman will earn the thanks of all those people.

I often say that the most invisible group of people in our society is carers. They are behind closed doors. They often cannot go out. They are trapped into the caring responsibility which they must undertake. As legislators, it is our job to ensure that doors are opened to them, to enable them not only to continue their work, which is so valuable and which saves the community so much money, but to participate in society.

Clause 8 specifically relates to carers. It is an excellent way of ensuring that a carer is able to do the job. Many people have that job thrust on them. It is not just a matter

[Ms. Jo Richardson]

of respite care, which is essential to people who have the responsibility thrust on them day and night—very often a 24-hour job. Respite care is very much a hit-and-miss affair, depending on the resources of the local authority. It is also a matter of training. It is extraordinary that, given the caring responsibilities of those who undertake this work, it is rare that they get any kind of help and advice about how to cope with the person for whom they are caring.

I know of many women—and, indeed, of one or two men—who have to lift another person in their family in and out of a bath or on and off the toilet—that is quite common—but they have no idea of how to do so properly and how to save themselves getting a bad back. One women of my acquaintance has a permanently damaged back because she has a heavy husband. She has managed to teach herself with no help from outside how to lift her husband in and out of the bath. I hope that the board will consider such matters when assessing the abilities of carers.

Finally, I hope that when the Bill becomes law—I hope that it will receive its Third Reading today without anybody saying anything against it because there can be nothing against it—the position of carers will form a central feature of the developments that the hon. Member for Belfast, South has so widely put forward.

1.10 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): This is an important occasion for the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). I congratulate him both on his good fortune in the ballot for private Members' Bills and on his choice of Bill. He has made the case for his Bill upstairs in Committee and here in the House today with both eloquence and obvious sincerity. Speaking from the Opposition Front Bench, I express our warm support for the Bill's purposes and our desire to see it fully and speedily implemented.

As the House knows, the Bill's purpose is to apply to Northern Ireland the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, which my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke)—with support from both sides and both Houses of Parliament—took to the statute book with such marked skill and humanity. My hon. Friend was naturally anxious to be in the House to see this further progress in extending his Act to Northern Ireland. Through no fault of his own, he cannot be here, but I am sure he is very much in the thoughts of everyone present for this debate.

Very unfortunately for many disabled people, my hon. Friend's Act still awaits full implementation on this side of the water. Extremely important sections of the Act still lie dormant on the statute book nearly three years after it became law. I refer to sections 1, 2, 3, 7 and 11, all of which are of the first importance to the Act's purposes. The Government's failure to implement those sections of the 1986 Act is said to be due to lack of resources; but that does not convince many right hon. and hon. Members, even on the Conservative Benches, who have spoken of their frustration and concern. The Government's excuse for delay is totally rejected on this side of the House and by all the organisations of and for disabled people. They regard the delay in implementing the Act as both disgraceful and scandalous.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Does my right hon. Friend not find it worrying or ironic that today we are talking about extending the existing 1986 Act to Northern Ireland when, as he rightly said, we do not seem to have fully implemented the Act satisfactorily in the other part of the United Kingdom? I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that in Humberside we are greatly concerned about that because disabled persons, especially mentally ill children, are not being provided with the right kind of services when they come out of hospital. My right hon. Friend referred to resources. Does he agree that it is ironic that we have just put £14·7 billion—or some phenomenal sum—into reserves yet people like that are not being——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I very much hope that hon. Members will not pursue that matter because this is a Northern Ireland Bill.

Mr. Morris: My hon. Friend spoke about resources, as the Minister did at the Committee stage. I understand the concern of both sides of the House about the unsatisfactory reason given for the delay in providing them. Incontrovertibly, the resources have been and are now available for the full implementation of the 1986 Act. The problem is not one of resources, but of political will and priorities. Yet the provisions of the Disabled Persons Act 1986 are, in human terms, surely deserving of the highest priority. To govern is to choose, and, sadly, Ministers have chosen other priorities in preference to the full implementation of an Act which is so important to people with disabilities, their families and their carers. My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) made wholly valid points about the importance of the role of carers and I entirely agree with her. She was right to make that role more visible in this House. We need to be told more by the Minister about the resources the Government intend to make available for the full implementation of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Bill.

In Committee the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland stated that his Department spends proportionately more on health care—more than 20 per cent.—than is spent in England and Wales. Can the Minister now tell us what that higher priority for health care spending in North Ireland means in terms of the pace at which the Bill can be implemented there? What has he to say about implementation dates? Will he be able to move more quickly than the snail's pace of his colleagues on this side of the water? Fewer than three weeks have passed since the Committee stage, but I hope that the Minister can now give the House more precise guidance than he was able to do in Committee.

In Committee the Minister said that in Northern Ireland:

> "People are not moved out of hospitals or institutions without there being a plan for them to go into the community."

But he later said:

> "We are determined in Northern Ireland that nobody, but nobody, will leave institutional care and go into the community without individual care plans. If there is any question of anyone going out into the community without such a plan, because it has not been arranged . . . "

That appeared to amend, or at least modify, the Minister's earlier statements. I hope that he can tell us more today about his Department's survey of what actually happens to people who move from institutional care in Northern Ireland into the community. The Minister referred to the survey as being one to establish the facts. In response to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) in Committee, who had referred to the people from mental hospitals in England who now live in cardboard boxes in some of our cities, he said:

"We shall not have people living in cardboard boxes on the streets of Northern Ireland."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 22 March 1989; c. 8-12.]

Without the proper assessments required by the Bill the revolving-door syndrome—about which MIND has spoken—will continue with all the tragic consequences that flow from it for disabled people. Time after time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West said in Committee, people are released from hospital and then have to be readmitted. As the House has been told on more than one occasion in debates on the care of people released from long-stay hospitals, people spend weeks or months in between release and readmission not only in cardboard boxes, but often in gaol.

What proper assessment aims to achieve is that people with disabilities are given the right help, in the right place and at the right time. That is what successful rehabilitation of disabled people is all about and why the delay in giving full implementation to the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 is so misconceived and so self-defeating in that appropriate care is also the most cost effective. There is no saving in denying people with disabilities the care appropriate to their needs when they leave long-stay hospitals. If community care, properly so-called, is not available to them, they are often forced to stay in or to return to institutional care at a far higher cost to the taxpayer than that of providing care in the community. Thus the policy of so strictly rationing resources for community care is neither cost-effective nor humane.

Any discussion of community care raises, of course, another inexcusable delay for which the Government are under attack from both sides of the House, namely, their failure to respond to the report from Sir Roy Griffiths, which was published over a year ago. It is indefensible for the Government to have dragged their feet for so long in relation to a report—whatever one may think of its findings—of such importance to many of the most needful people in Britain today.

The Bill has been described as being, in part, a parliamentary response to Griffiths. To that extent it anticipates the Government's response about which many of us now urgently want to be informed. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary is a Minister for Northern Ireland, but he is also a member of the Government as a whole. Can he now say when we will have the Government's response to Griffiths? At the same time, can he tell us any more than has so far been disclosed to the House about implementation dates for sections 1, 2, 3, 7 and 11 of the 1986 Act from which this Bill flows? He must have had consultations with ministerial colleagues on this matter if only because of the embarrassment that could result from speedier implementation of the legislation in Northern Ireland than in England, Scotland and Wales.

The last information that we had from the Minister for the disabled, was that section 11 would be the next section to be implemented at the end of this year. We were told that the implementation of section 7 would follow and then, even later, the implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3. The Minister gave us that information at a meeting of the all-party disablement group in the House on 24 January.

Can the Parliamentary Under-Secretary go any further today? He may know that his ministerial colleague was left in no doubt at the meeting of the all-party group that there is deep concern on both sides of the House about the delay in implementing crucial sections of the 1986 Act. Can the Parliamentary Under-Secretary give us any further information today?

With specific regard to the individual care plans for disabled people moving out of hospitals in Northern Ireland, who draws them up? Can the Minister tell us who is involved? How much further does clause 7 go than existing practice in Northern Ireland? It is extremely important for us to know, before the Bill leaves this House for the other place, how existing practice works, how successful it has been and precisely what changes the Minister envisages when the Bill is enacted and fully implemented?

In Committee the Minister won praise for his helpful response to the issues raised and for being refreshingly frank and fair in debate. I feel sure that he will want to be as helpful as possible in clarifying the Government's position today. In so doing, will he clarify the arrangements where a patient is discharged to Great Britain from a hospital in Northern Ireland or from a hospital in Great Britain to Northern Ireland? That question also has implications for implementation dates on both sides of the Irish sea.

I visited Northern Ireland as the then Minister for the Disabled, in the late 1970s. That was shortly after the extension to Northern Ireland of my Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. That was accomplished by Lord Fitt who was then the Member of Parliament for Belfast, West. I was told by disabled people in Northern Ireland of the very considerable importance of the 1970 Act to them and of the concern of their organisations about the long delay there had been in extending its provisions to the United Kingdom as a whole.

I pay tribute today to all who work in the service of disabled people in Northern Ireland and profoundly hope that the Minister can assure us that this Bill will be fully and speedily implemented there. It is about ending preventable suffering and making life better for people whose claims on the attention of this House are among the most important we have to consider. To economise on them at a time when the Chancellor has such an enormous surplus at his disposal, and when the richest 1 per cent. of taxpayers have never had it so good, is patently unacceptable to everyone who understands the importance to disabled people—not least to disabled children—of this Bill and the legislation from which it derives.

Again I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South. I thank the Minister for his helpfulness in Committee and pledge total support from these Benches for the fastest possible enactment and implementation of this Bill.

1.23 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I shall be brief. I should like to lend support to the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) in welcoming the measure that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) has brought to the House as a private Member's Bill this afternoon. We, too, hope that it will be speedily implemented.

I have on two hats—I represent pressure groups for the disabled in Redcar and the Northern Ireland Council on Disability. Both organisations are concerned that we might see the same sort of delays with this Bill that we saw with the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. We are keen that it should be implemented quickly and want assurances from the Minister when he responds this afternoon that we shall not have to wait solely on lack of resources.

Sometimes, the Government use another excuse for delaying legislation—lack of statistical detail and factual background. I am sure that the Minister will remember that the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' survey did not apply to the disabled in Northern Ireland. The information service press release which it put out on 15 December 1988 said that a survey on disability for Northern Ireland would be carried out. The press release said that the survey would be

"carried out by the Policy, Planning and Research Unit of the Department of Finance and Personnel and will take about 2 years to complete."

It would be useful for the Minister to tell us how that survey has progressed in the first couple of months, whether it is on schedule and what results—if any—have been found up to now. It would be useful to know whether he will tell us at a later date that the Bill will not be implemented because the factual background and statistical detail is not available and there will be a two-year wait for the statistics. If we are to hear that excuse it would be useful if we could hear it from the Minister this afternoon so that we do not have to wait for oral and written questions and then, in two years' time, find that we are given this excuse.

I should like to highlight clause 5 which relates to special needs education which, with part of the Education Reform Act 1988 being implemented in Northern Ireland, concerns many Opposition Members. We are concerned about what will be done for those with special needs when the national curriculum is introduced and whether children in need of particular educational requirements will be denied that curriculum or segregated. Clause 5 is important in relation to education for that group.

Finally, if I may make so bold, I ask the Minister to clarify his position on how the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 applies to Northern Ireland. I am sure that he remembers responding to the hon. Member for Belfast, South in Committee by saying:

"The Department was considering introducing a Bill, but the hon. Gentleman"—

namely, the hon. Member for Belfast, South—

"came to our rescue. We are therefore most grateful to him. I think that we all agree that the 1986 Act should apply in Northern Ireland."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 22 March 1989; c. 5.]

However, in response to a question about whether the Bill should apply to Northern Ireland, the Minister said in a written answer:

"No. It would not be appropriate for Northern Ireland to be included in the scope of this Bill."—[*Official Report*, 24 February 1986; Vol. 92, *c436*]

I am sure that by that the Minister meant that it should not relate to the 1986 Act, but it would be useful if he would put that on record so that we are not left with contrary views that could be misinterpreted by the Minister.

We should be grateful if these two points were dealt with. We lend our full support to this Bill, but we want reassurance from the Minister that the political will and the resources exist to implement it, so that we do not have to wait as long as we did for regulations to be introduced under the 1986 Act, and so that disabled people will begin to benefit.

1.31 pm

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): I welcome the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and to ask the House to consider whether the Bill offers enough protection for the disabled, especially those discharged from hospitals because of the pressures imposed on staff due to the denial of adequate finance for the National Health Service.

I draw this problem to the attention of the House because of the horrific circumstances in which my constituent John Carl Wright was discharged from a Coventry hospital into the community. Because of the Government's unwillingness to provide adequate finance, the hospital could not give him proper support. That led to a sequence of events which resulted in my constituent being detained in Birmingham's Winson Green hospital—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not pursue this case very far, because the Bill is a Northern Ireland Bill. On Third Reading we are required to address ourselves to what is in the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: The circumstances that applied to my constituent could apply to a disabled person in Northern Ireland. I ask the House to consider whether a society in which such circumstances arise is civilised. Was my disabled constituent a criminal, or are the real criminals the Government who deny the necessary services for support in the community—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman might be on safer ground if he hypothesised about a hypothetical person in Northern Ireland who might find himself in hypothetical circumstances that were affected by the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: Whether the person lives in Northern Ireland, England, Wales or Scotland, the problems of all such people have been compounded by the changes in social security benefits. Government figures show that 3.65 million disabled people will be losers under the new system. New claimants could be £50 a week worse off from these changes.

I support this Bill, and congratulate its promotion.

1.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I was pleased to hear the contribution by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) and noted his interest in the

affairs of Northern Ireland. I look forward to his continued participation in such debates, given his obvious knowledge about the affairs of the Province.

We have spent much time discussing aspects of the 1986 Act which, of course, do not bear on the Bill, although I accept that what we are discussing is an exact replica of that Act. I shall do what I can to answer the questions posed by the right hon. Member for Manchester Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) about the aspects of the legislation that affect Northern Ireland. However, I am afraid that I am not able to do that in connection with matters that are the responsibility of my colleagues.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) knew the answer to the second question that she asked before she posed it. The 1986 Act was not appropriate for Northern Ireland because in Northern Ireland the social services and the health boards are integrated. That is why the Griffiths report does not have the relevance to Northern Ireland that it has to the rest of Britain. That was also why in Committee I congratulated the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) on rightly pushing the Government to introduce the Bill. Although we had intended to do so, I congratulate him again on getting the Bill as far as he has.

The Bill institutionalises the good practice, which I hope currently exists, as the basis for caring for disabled people in Northern Ireland. It is right for the Bill to do that. I hope that in Northern Ireland the vast majority of the proposals in the Bill are already being applied. I accept that there is a need to institutionalise them and to build on them and we shall certainly do that.

The hon. Member for Redcar asked about the review. That was a "When did you stop beating your wife?" type of question. As the hon. Lady well knows, we do not intend to come forward prematurely with proposals that have been properly thought through or are not based on the statistics that are available to us. A review that could not be supported by the facts would be a mockery.

I shall not repeat what I said in Committee to the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe, but I stand by what I said then. Under no circumstances will we allow people in Northern Ireland to be released into the community without an assessment being made of their needs; nor will we tolerate people living in cardboard boxes. As I said in Committee and elsewhere, if there is any question of people not having proper care they will not be moved out. We shall ensure and insist that proper care is provided in every case. As I have said many times, we have no evidence that that has happened to anyone. If anyone can give us such evidence I shall look upon it with the utmost gravity.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Needham: No. I shall now reply to the hon. Member for Belfast, South, whose Bill it is. The sections of the Great Britain Act that are currently in force are sections 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10. The equivalent clauses in the Bill are 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9. As the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) said, clause 8 relates to carers. I was grateful for and accept her comments about carers. Clause 8 is a crucial part of the Bill. I trust that the boards in Northern Ireland consider cases at the moment with regard to carers in the terms set out in the Bill. We hope to get the equivalent clauses into operation as quickly as possible. I give an undertaking to the hon. Member for Belfast, South that we intend to do that as quickly as possible.

Ms. Mowlam: My point and the point that I am sure that the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) was making is that we appreciate that the Minister says that he will do this as quickly as possible. However, we are concerned that many sections of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 are still awaiting implementation. Therefore, "as quickly as possible" is a little vague and general. We want a definite response from the Minister about the time span.

With regard to my earlier point, I was not interested in whether the Minister beats his wife although it looks as if someone has beaten him this afternoon. I was asking specifically whether he will use the survey which is being carried out into disability in Northern Ireland over the next two years as a reason why nothing will happen over the next two years. The Minister's response seemed to be that we will have to wait two years before anything happens.

Mr. Needham: I did not say that. The hon. Lady heard perfectly well what I said. She reaffirms my view that she knew the answer to the question that she asked. She knows perfectly well that whatever I say she will treat as unsatisfactory. It would be intolerable, as the hon. Lady knows, for us to come forward with a review if it had not been thought out and we did not have all the available statistics. This process will take however long is necessary. I cannot say that it will take two years, two months or two days. We will do it as quickly as possible, as the hon. Lady knows. We need to do it as quickly as possible to ensure that the service available for disabled people in Northern Ireland is as capable and adequate as we can make it.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe asked why there is such so much money available for the budget in Northern Ireland in comparison to the rest of the country. The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Redcar know that there are higher levels of deprivation and morbidity in Northern Ireland. I was grateful to the hon. Member for Belfast, South for explaining the valid reasons for the funding and for putting on the record some of the not so valid reasons.

We must analyse how we can best use the resources. We are going back to the boards to discuss the costs of this legislation once it is introduced. The figures are not available at the moment. The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe knows only too well that it is not for me to say, priority by priority, how the boards spend the money that is allocated to them. If I did that, there would be no point in having the boards. It is up to the boards, as part of their strategic plans, to determine how the resouces are to be spent and what resources they can find to implement the legislation.

However, I accept that the Bill is important and necessary for Northern Ireland. I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast, South on the way in which he has handled his Bill and, as I said, I will do everything to ensure that we implement as quickly as possible everything that is already being implemented in Britain. Thereafter, we will look at the other clauses, which I hope will soon be sections, to see how quickly we can add those to the list. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Belfast, South

[Mr. Needham]

that we must do everything possible to improve and build on the very good level of care that we currently provide for disabled people in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I call Mr. Skinner.

1.44 pm

Mr. Skinner (Bolsover): Said Mr. Deputy Speaker with a heavy sigh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman underrates the gravity with which I called him.

Mr. Skinner: I was here this morning on the dot, and I have just listened to the Minister reply to the points made by my right hon. and hon. Friends. I also recall other Bills for the disabled being brought before the House since 1970 by other Back Benchers. One of them was my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who in 1970, together with his brother, introduced a Bill. My right hon. Friend has been arguing for additional resources for the disabled ever since.

The law is being broken left, right and centre by the Government and by mainly Tory local authorities refusing to implement the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlem) asks when the Bill will be enacted and when extra resources will be made available. Despite her further intervention, the Minister has not given a satisfactory reply.

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) should beware the sprat that is thrown to catch a mackerel. There is just half a chance that the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will tell him that a little more might be done, provided that he signs on the dotted line in respect of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I can see that coming. I can see there being a bit of blackmail, with the Government saying, "We can hurry this measure along and help the hon. Member with his private Member's Bill", because that is how callously the Government treat the disabled. If that were not the case, why does my right hon. Friend have to battle week in, week out for the necessary resources? I warn all right hon. and hon. Members who think that the Bill is past the post that they should beware when a private Member's Bill is given the nod by the Government.

One would think that the Government did not have the money to implement the Bill yet we are talking about helping only 100,000 disabled people in Northern Ireland. We are talking about providing them with telephones, and it can be argued that they need telephones more than people in other parts of the United Kingdom. Only a few weeks ago the Chancellor of the Exchequer told the House, "I've got £14,000 million and I do not know what to do with it." Then a Minister tells the House on a Friday afternoon that he does not know where the resources to meet the Bill's provisions will come from—just a few hundreds of millions of pounds to help to meet the needs of the disabled.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe pointed out that the Bill is all about making sure that assessments are speeded up. We know only too well that it is one thing to tell the disabled that their local authority is looking into the matter, but it is another when an official reveals that the rate support grant has been cut again and that assessments must be slowed down, saying, "We feel sorry for the disabled but we must shove those assessments into a little pigeon hole." The country is awash with money. The Chancellor is paying off the national debt when he should be paying off society's debt to the disabled both in Britain and in Northern Ireland. He should be paying off our debt to the people who have grafted all their lives and who generated this country's wealth. Instead, we have a tinpot Minister coming to the House who must have tumbled off his motor bike—he has a scar on his face.

The Minister says that he cannot guarantee when the Bill will be enacted, but he dangles that prospect like a carrot. It may be a question of waiting until a few moffths before the next general election and then of making a special announcement to provide a sweetener to the people of Northern Ireland. We may subsequently see English, Scottish and Welsh Ministers coming to the House and telling my right hon. Friend that, in lieu of the Northern Ireland legislation, the Government intend doing a little more.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Redcar wanted the Minister to be more specific over timing.

Ms. Mowlam: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that one of the reasons why the Northern Ireland Council on Disability is so keen to see the legislation on the statutue book is the impact of the Government training schemes, which is causing particular concern in Northern Ireland. The schemes are not servicing the needs of the disabled and many young disabled people have no future.

Mr. Skinner: This has always been a problem in Northern Ireland. Disabled people are usually at the bottom of the pile, and you can bet your bottom dollar that in a capitalist society they will be the first to be shoved on one side and thrown on the scrap heap. If hon. Members look at the cardboard boxes on the Charing Cross embankment, they will see a lot of disabled people.

In Northern Ireland, mass unemployment has prevailed throughout my lifetime at least. It has never been conquered, and it is one of the problems—although not the only one—at the root of the trouble in Northern Ireland. That is why from time to time the Government throw other little sprats, such as the Harland and Wolff privatisation scheme, but I shall not talk about that today —I noticed you shuffling in your chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me say this to the Minister: get along to the Prime Minister—when she has got rid of her flavour-of-the-month friend Gorbachev—and tell her, "There has been a debate in the House of Commons this morning about a necessary Bill for Northern Ireland. Only a few hundred million pounds are needed to provide a bit more comfort for disabled people there." The Minister is not listening; he does not care.

Let the hon. Gentleman say to the Prime Minister, "You are the Prime Minister who, only a few weeks ago, found £500 million on the nod to try to placate a dozen Tory Kent constituencies with which you were in trouble." The Bexley Mujahidin came down with the hordes, and she found the money—I hear that it has now risen to £800 million. That is the Prime Minister who found a sum of money on a television programme because there was a mix-up over some figures between her and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. She trots around all those

gimmicks. Is it not time that Ministers had the guts to challenge her? Instead of letting themselves be treated like rubbing rags or dishcloths, why do they not say to her, "If I am to carry out the proper wishes of the people of Northern Ireland, I need money"? And the same applies in Great Britain.

Having more or less assured the hon. Member for Belfast, South that the Bill would be passed, and having given him other little assurances on the side that everything would be all right, the Minister now comes along on the fateful morning—sent by his gaffer—to tell the House, "I will not give in on the question of resources", and to stick to it rigidly. He has been told, "Stand your ground. We have £14,000 million of taxpayers' money, but you cannot give it to the disabled."

I think that the Minister should make one last effort to answer at the Dispatch Box. He should say exactly what he will do about resources, when the Bill will be enacted, when the necessary assessments will be made and when money will be provided to cure some of the problems in Northern Ireland. Then we in Great Britain can build on that.

1.53 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth: I appreciate the helpful contributions made by hon. Members on both sides of the House, particularly the arguments of the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) on behalf of carers. I think that the Minister has got the message.

I was also delighted by what was said by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). It may reflect a conversation that I had recently with an old sparring partner of his who now deals with social services in Northern Ireland, and who sent his greetings.

If there is any suspicion that we in Northern Ireland can be bought off on this day of days, I must say that we, too, can speak Russian and that we say, "Niet."

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Common Land (Rectification of Registers) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[MR. HAROLD WALKER *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

REMOVAL FROM REGISTER

Amendments made: No. 1, in page 1, line 6, leave out from 'the' to end of line 9 and insert

'registration authority maintaining a register of common land and of town and village greens under the Commons Registration Act 1965, object to the inclusion on either of the registers of the whole or part of any land in respect of which the requirements specified in subsection (1A) below are satisfied.

(1A) Those requirements are—

(a) that there is, and at all times since 5th August 1945 has been, a dwellinghouse on the land;

(b) that in so far as the land is not the site of the dwellinghouse it consists of land ancillary to that dwellinghouse; and

(c) that the land does not include any land which on the said 5th August was niether the site of the dwellinghouse which was then on the land nor land ancillary to that dwellinghouse.

(1B) For the purposes of subsection (1A) above land ancillary to a dwellinghouse means a garden, private garage or outbuildings used and enjoyed with the dwellinghouse; and in that subsection "dwellinghouse" includes a building consisting of two or more separate dwellings.'.

No. 3, in page 1, line 13, leave out from beginning to end of line 16 and insert

'requirements specified in subsection (1A) above are satisfied in the case of the land to which the objection relates, he shall give notice of his decision to the registration authority who shall modify the register so as to exclude that land.

(3) Where a register is modified under this section so as to exclude any land the registration authority shall also cancel the registration of any person as the owner of that land.'.—*[Mr. Favell.]*

Clause 1, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 2 and 3 disagreed to.

Clause 4

CITATION

Amendment made: No. 5, in page 2, line 6, at end insert—

'(2) This Act applies in relation to land in which there is a Crown or Duchy interest within the meaning of section 23 of the said Act of 1965 as it applies to land in which there is no such interest.

(3) This Act does not extend to Scotland or Northern Ireland.'.—*[Mr. Favell.]*

Clause 4, as amended, agreed to.

New Clause 1

REGULATIONS

'Section 19(1), (4) and (5) of the said Act 1965 (Regulations) shall have effect as if this Act were included in that Act; and regulations under that section may also prescribe the payment of a fee not exceeding £100 on the making of an objection under this Act.'.—*[Mr. Favell.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Title

Amendment made: No. 6, in line 1, leave out from beginning to 'and' in line 5 and insert

'Provide for removing from the registers maintained under the Commons Registration Act 1965 land on which there is, and at all times since 5th August 1945, has been a dwelling house.'. —*[Mr. Favell.]*

Bill, as amended, reported.

Order for Third Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Queen's and Prince of Wales's consent?

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): So given.

1.56 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Under the Commons Registration Act 1965, all common land in England and Wales, or a town or village green, together with rights of common ownership of such land has to be registered. In all, about 1·5 million acres of land were registered. Kate Ashbrook of the Open Spaces Society says in her excellent booklet "Our Common Right" that the variety of landscape and habitat embraced by common land is quite unique. Both she and others who are interested in our rural heritage want to protect the existing commons. I support them in their anxiety to see the Government implement the pledge that was given in the last Conservative party manifesto to that effect.

This short Bill is directed not towards protecting existing commons but towards remedying an injustice that arose out of the 1965 Act. The result is that several hundred home owners have had their houses registered as common land and they have found that it is difficult, if not impossible, to sell their houses.

Under the 1965 Act, common land has to be registered. Acre upon acre was registered provisionally by interested parties. Provisional registration was advertised. If no objection was received by a date now long since past, those rights were recorded on a common register. Unfortunately, the Act contained no provision to remove from the register houses that had been registered as common land by mistake. It is towards remedying that defect and injustice that the Bill is directed.

1.59 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I support the Bill, and I should like to use this opportunity to make some points on the wider issues. The Bill addresses a small element of the problem that surrounds common land, and I welcome the opportunity that it affords to put right a small part of what is wrong. I also welcome the Bill's proposals in relation to land registry and the fact that it does not appear to prejudice the more general legislation that is so obviously needed.

There are deficiencies under the Commons Registration Act 1965 which need to be rectified. The Bill addresses itself to the anomaly of land mistakenly registered as common land and makes provision to deregister in such cases. At least two safeguards should be introduced. First, application to deregister under the Bill should be advertised on site and, secondly, the common registers office—usually the county council—should notify the Commons Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society. That would ensure that full and fair public notice was given of any claim to deregister and that appropriate experts with the necessary resources and commitment could properly assess the case in hand.

I am sure that Conservative Members who support the Bill will agree that we have been waiting for a long time for comprehensive legislation to deal with the matter. The Government must address themselves to the much wider issues of common land registration. This is the appropriate time to ask exactly when they will honour their manifesto commitment to common land on the basis of the common land forum. The Government have said that they will legislate as soon as parliamentary time permits. They must surely be able to give a clear indication of when that will be. I suggest that these are matters of political will. I hope that the Government will have the political will to deal with this matter just as they have clearly shown their political will in respect of many other issues for which they have made parliamentary time, and the time of parliamentary counsel, available.

Mr. Favell: I shall probably not have another opportunity to speak, so let me just say that I agree with the hon. Lady that applications or objections under the Bill should be clearly advertised on site. The Bill has had to be introduced precisely because people were not aware of what was happening. I also agree with the hon. Lady that we need omnibus legislation. Finally, I think that it would be useful if societies such as the open space society and other interested parties were made aware of applications under the Bill.

Ms. Walley: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention. It would be sad if we made the same mistakes in the Bill as were made 20 years ago. The Minister is nodding; I am sure that she has taken those points on board.

I am not usually a cynical person but if one were cynical, one might imagine that groups such as the Moorland Association had undue influence upon the Government through traditional channels. Those private interest groups made loud noises following the Conservative manifesto commitment, saying that access to areas of grouse moorland and the like registered as common land should be restricted to public footpaths. Any concessions to such interest groups would lead to equal pressure being exerted by other groups and would debase the agreement surrounding the common land forum. They would also represent a clear breach of the Government's manifesto promise.

The public have a right to walk on all common land in England and Wales subject to commonsense restrictions enshrined in bye-law's. At present there are 1·5 million acres of common land—an area the size of Lincolnshire —yet the public have rights in relation to only one fifth of that area. It is clear that management associations should be made up of all interests in common land—owners, common rights holders and the public—represented by local authority nominees. Such associations would sort out the necessary provision of common land in the best interest for use and recreation by the general public.

Perhaps the most essential purpose of the legislation is to sort out all the deficiencies of the Commons Registration Act 1965. The Act allows properly registered land to be deregulated, for example if the owner of the land gets the common right holders to give up those rights, thus extinguishing common land and allowing it to be deregistered. Therefore, further to deregistering land that is mistakenly classified as common land, the legislation should tighten up abuses of the system which allow properly registered land to be deregulated. All land on the registers at the time of this legislation should be deemed to

remain common land, unless there is proof that it was originally classified by mistake. Those measures are supported by the common land forum and were endorsed by the Government. I ask for a clear commitment to those principles by the Government and for it to be made known if and when the Government will honour their promises. In that context, I welcome the Bill.

2.5 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) on bringing forward this important Bill which will rectify an injustice and grievances which have faced many people in this country. I will put the matter in its context to reply to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley).

The registration of commons took place as a first step to meet the 1958 Royal Commission's report on common land and its suggestion that legislation should be brought forward to cover common land generally—obviously, a first step was to establish registration—before moving on to measures covering better management and access, which the hon. Lady mentioned. Arising out of the Commons Registration Act have been the anomalies which my hon. Friend hopes to redress. The common land forum was set up by the Countryside Commission to analyse the various steps that would be necessary to meet some of the 1958 Royal Commission's report. It produced its report in 1986, and, a year later, the Government produced a consultation paper on the basis of it.

Although there is broad agreement on many issues and the common land forum did an excellent job in bringing together diverse interests—for example, access groups, local authorities and landowners—several controversial issues have not been satisfactorily settled. As soon as it is possible to make progress on legislation, when parliamentary time is available, the Government will bring forward that legislation. I share the hon. Lady's wish for these matters to be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. It must be on the basis of a little further work and agreement. Within that overall strategy, which is a firm Government commitment, we are making headway today with my hon. Friend's Bill to redress the anomaly.

The hon. Lady asked for an assurance that local authorities will be informed of any proposals to remove a property from the register. I can give that assurance. When we make regulations as soon as possible after the legislation comes into force, we will make sure that the widest possible publicity is given to applications under it. We expect that publicity to include advertisements in the local press, notice to local authorities, including parish councils, and, possibly, a notice on the property. We will also give sympathetic consideration to any suggestion that amenity societies should be informed of an application to remove a dwelling from the register. The lack of notification led to many of the difficulties of the 1965 Act.

I wish the Bill well and hope that it will achieve the objective of dealing with unfortunate anomalies.

2.9 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I have lived all my life in the countryside, and my constituency is rural in character. It is about 30 miles long and about the same wide.

For the past 12 months or thereabouts I have sat in this House and heard talk from the Government about privatising water. I should like to know from the Minister just how this Bill will fit in, supposing that water is privatised and that the Water Bill receives Royal Assent this year. When the French come in and buy up all the land, how much will this Bill, introduced by the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell), prove to have been taken into account in relation to the privatisation? Instead of private companies or public authorities holding 75 per cent. of the land associated with water, Perrier-type people will be buying it all up. Therefore, I want to know what safeguards the Government will provide to make sure that the Bill is carried through properly.

I also want to know—I have not heard this from the Minister—about the money that will be provided. However, perhaps I should not ask too many questions too quickly because the Minister's hon. Friend the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) is having to run backwards and forwards to the civil servants in the Box to try to find the answers. These things should have been thought through.

If the Government are so keen on privatising water, they should not be giving these assurances to their hon. Friend the Member for Stockport who also wants to privatise water but who wants at the same time to preserve common land to some extent. Those two things are in contradiction and we want an answer on that point.

I also want to know who will be responsibile for picking up the litter on the common land. We hear a lot of talk from the Prime Minister who runs about the country with a bag in her hand——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address himself to what is in the Bill. It is about removing from the register of common land certain dwelling houses as specified in the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, and when those things are removed from the register——

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): What comes after?

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to ask what comes after. One cannot deregulate this and deregulate that and expect everything to remain the same. I have asked a simple enough question. The Prime Minister runs to Tory party conferences talking about, "Bag it and bin it and stick her in it"—at least that is what she should have said. What is going to happen? Who will see to the litter? How much money will the Government provide to ensure that the provisions of the Bill are carried out?

I referred earlier to the fact that there is all this money in the country, so will the Minister provide the necessary resources? *[Interruption.]* I am not talking about this year; I am talking about later. The hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley) has been a Minister for only five minutes and does not know whether she is on this earth or Fuller's. I am telling her that private Member's Bills have been passed before. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) was here earlier. He thought that he had got all the money under the sun for the chronically sick and the disabled back in 1970, but they did not get it. That is why I am

[Mr. Skinner]

asking these questions. What about the necessary resources? I should like to hear from the Minister about what effect the water privatisation——

Mr. Favell: The hon. Gentleman, who represents Bolsover, which is a place that I know well because I fought the seat in 1979—alas unsuccessfully—has raised an important point. In the Bill I have provided that those applying to take their houses off the register should pay a fee not exceeding £100 so that no burden should fall on others.

Mr. Skinner: And that will apply this year, next year and sometime never, irrespective of the rate of inflation and other things? The way that we are going on with 8 per cent. inflation, it will not be long before that £100 will have to be changed. It is all very well to think that here we are caught in a time warp on a Friday morning and that everything in the garden is lovely, but we should project our minds a little further ahead and think about what this Bill will mean when water has been privatised, when the French have moved in and when we are under the domain of the Common Market to an even greater extent than at present—and that will happen because the Tories will give in over and over again. We should think about all those things and about what the Bill will mean. It will probably not be worth a row of beans.

I am asking the hon. Member for Stockport to ask the Minister to ensure that the safeguards are built in not just for today, and that the Bill will have something of value in years to come.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Licensing (Low Alcohol Drinks) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.15 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I consider that Private Members' time is a traditional time for remedying deficiencies in our legislation, and my Bill is in that mould. It seeks to rectify an anomaly in the law relating to beverages. I declare a distant interest as I am a master of wine by qualification. That involves an examination based on a thorough knowledge and evaluation of wine. I should like to place on record my thanks to the National United Temperance Council, whose energetic secretary, the Reverend Bernard Kinman, has been most helpful, to Mrs. Ann Jesper of Leisure Drinks Limited and to those right hon. and hon. Members who have indicated their support, especially the hon. Members for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) and for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). The Bill clearly has all-party support.

Garibaldi could have been right when he said:

"Bacchus has drowned more men than Neptune."

Moderation in the consumption of alcohol is very much the sensible approach today. At a governmental level the production, distribution and sale of beverages crosses many Departments. I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department to our debate. Only this week the Home Office research and planning unit produced a study of drinking and disorder in rural areas. Today the House has the opportunity to bring legislation into line with modern practices. It is nonsensical that the law regarding low and non-alcoholic drinks is based on the manufacturing process rather than on the alcohol present in the product at the time of sale. As a result, shandy, which may be 0·9 per cent. by volume, can be bought in any corner shop selling soft drinks, but a de-alcoholised wine only 0·05 per cent. by volume cannot be sold through such an outlet and is legally confined to licensed premises.

The market for alternative drinks hardly existed in the United Kingdom before the 1980s. The phenomenal growth, together with the increase in the consumption of mineral waters, constitutes possibly the most significant change in drinking habits this century. Those changes have evolved alongside greater public awareness of health care, drinking and driving, and of the alcoholic factor in such issues as child abuse, broken homes, football hooliganism and a long list of criminal activities.

The fact that similar trends have been observed in the United States of America and in other countries gives good reason to assume that this change in the nation's drinking habits is not a passing fad. It is necessary that alternative drinks be covered by unambiguous and enforceable legislation. Existing legislation—both the Licensing Act 1964 and the labelling regulations—causes confusion not only to the public, but to the trade. Despite that simple fact, the Licensing Act, when applied to alternative drinks, makes a distinction according to the method of production, and the labelling regulations make a distinction according to the type of drink.

Imagine a girl serving behind a bar in a large hotel in one of our major cities plaintively asking, "Can I sell this low alcohol lager in the afternoon?" Such a scene highlights a growing identification problem that afternoon opening hours have not resolved.

The problem is the complicated labelling requirements for drinks that do not need a licence. Those are not the regular soft drinks—we all know where we stand with those—but the new breed of alternative drinks. Those are the non-alcoholic lagers and wines, and many other non-alcoholic drinks now coming on to the market, such as the Pernod and Campari lookalikes, and the vermouths and the ciders that contain less than the magic 1·14 per cent. of alcohol by volume above which a licence is required for their sale.

Why do the British have to complicate such things? In France, West Germany and the rest of the European Community, drinks below the respective country's licensing level are called such things as "alcohol-free wine" or "biere sans alcohol". In the United Kingdom the phrase "alcohol free" is used if the alcohol content is less than 0·05 per cent., the phrase "de-alcoholised" is used if the drink is below that level and "low alcohol" is used if the alcohol content is above 0·05 per cent. A drink must also be described as low alcohol if it is above the 0·05 per cent. content, but not produced by a de-alcoholisation process.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if one puts "alcohol free" on the label of a drink that contained a percentage of alcohol, but was below the required alcohol level, one would be misleading the public? They would believe that the drink was alcohol free and what would happen to those persons who suffer from an illness that makes them allergic to anything that contains alcohol? Would they be put at risk?

Mr. Gregory: I share some of the hon. Gentleman's reservations and I look forward to debating this further with him on Report.

The purpose of the Bill is to remove from the Licensing Act 1964 and the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 certain words that prevent some beverages with low alcohol content from being sold without a justice's licence or the Scottish equivalent. The definition of "intoxicating liquor" in section 201(1) of the Licensing Act 1964 contains an exception for, inter alia:

"any liquor, whether made on the premises of the brewer for sale or elsewhere, which is found on analysis of a sample thereof, at any time, to be of an original gravity not exceeding 1016° and of a strength not exceeding 1·2 per cent."

Time is now against me, but in a debate in the other place on 31 March 1988, Lord Lucas of Chilworth moved an amendment to the Licensing Bill which was similar to my Bill. The one area with which he did not deal was alcohol free clubs. If my Bill is passed such clubs would be allowed to open. Currently, we are forcing such clubs—clubs in the north of England are particularly anxious about this—to obtain a licence. That defeats the object they wish to achieve. At present retail outlets do not know whether it is legal to sell certain products because the production method may not be stated on the label.

I appreciate that we may be months away from new labelling legislation, which I would welcome. My Bill seeks to push us on to modern legislation a little quicker. As T.L. Peacock said in "Melincourt":

"There are two reasons for drinking; one is, when you are thirsty, to cure it; the other, when you are not thirsty, to prevent it."

The Bill will extend choice and introduce sense to the legislation on beverages. I commend it to the House.

2.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Time is short and therefore I shall be brief.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) has explained the purposes of the Bill and I will not repeat them save to say that he is to be congratulated on bringing the Bill before the House. My hon. Friend is correct that there is a problem with the definition. There is considerable merit in the suggestion that the definition should be directed at the alcoholic content of the drink at the moment of sale and not at the process of manufacture, which is now the case. The House may adopt such an approach. If it does so, it must then consider the threshold at which the definition must bite.

The Bill, as presently drafted, contemplates a definitional threshold of 1·2 per cent. by volume. The House may feel that that is too high and that some lower threshold is appropriate. That matter should be looked at on a subsequent occasion.

The Government are not opposed to the principle of the Bill; nor would we oppose its Second Reading. However, we have considerable reservations about the threshold as presently reflected in the provisions of the Bill.

2.24 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I too congratulate the hon. Member for York (Mr. Gregory) on introducing the Bill and providing the House with an opportunity to discuss a serious matter. I am also glad that the Minister has shown his support for the Bill in principle, although the Government are concerned about some technical matters, such as the levels of alcohol.

The 1964 Act, which the Bill aims to amend, is a complicated and thick piece of legislation. The definitions in the Act consist of two parts: the classes of liquors—referring to wines, spirits, beers and ciders—and the specific gravity. The 1964 Act was originally designed to ensure that when people bought drinks they were not watered down. The Bill provides the opportunity of moderating the consumption of drink. I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome the fact that people are being given the opportunity to choose which sort of drink to take.

The problems towards which the Bill is directed include those relating to young people when they go out together. A few weeks ago I saw a group of young students—sensible people—who wanted to go out for an evening. They all decided that they would go to a pub. I questioned them on this but they replied, "Where else can we go?" We seem to have a society where it is automatically assumed that if we want to go out, we go to a public house. When we arrive, there are compulsions and pressures to drink alcohol.

In light of the pressures that society has placed on young people it seems reasonable to ensure that they are given as wide a range of drinks as possible. I shall not expand on the way in which I should like pubs to change, because that would be wide of the Bill. We are talking about the levels of alcohol in the drinks on sale, in accordance with the Licensing Act 1964.

[Mr. Stuart Randall]

Another matter that concerns all hon. Members is the crime-related aspect of drink. As the House will be well aware, there are record levels of crime in this country and much of it is carried out by young people. We also know that those crimes are often drink related. Women and elderly people are often frightened about going out late at night because they fear that people who have drunk too much will be on the rampage.

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister made a valid and telling point when he raised the question of the level at which the alcohol-free symbol is used? Young children could be affected by 1·2 per cent. of alcohol.

Does my hon. Friend also agree that we must not only set the appropriate level but make it clear to the public at large that "alcohol free" may not mean "alcohol free", because some people who react to alcohol may be endangered by not understanding the real meaning of the phrase?

Mr. Randall: My hon. Friend makes a good point. We could mislead the public if drinks are not properly labelled. The Germans call drinks "alcohol frei". We must be careful because they are not always alcohol free.

I shall end now because other hon. Members want to speak. There is also a health aspect to this matter. The Opposition welcome the Bill and hope that it will have a speedy passage through the House.

2.29 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Common sense suggests that it must be socially desirable to increase the availability of low and non-alcoholic drinks, especially for drivers and young people, at a time of growing alcohol abuse.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) was absolutely right: the cut-off level of alcoholic content in the Bill, at 1·2 per cent., is far too high. There are good reasons——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 7 July.

Private Members' Bills

ABORTION (TREATMENT OF NON-RESIDENT WOMEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

INDECENT DISPLAYS (NEWSPAPERS AND WORKPLACES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 April.

FUEL AND ENERGY PROVISION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

PROTECTION OF RESIDENTS IN RETIREMENT HOMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

HOUSING THE HOMELESS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

PLANNING PERMISSION (DEMOLITION OF HOUSES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 July.

ABORTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

AGE OF LEGAL CAPACITY (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 April.

HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

FUNERAL INDUSTRY (CODE OF PRACTICE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

GAMING MACHINES (PROHIBITION ON USE BY PERSONS UNDER EIGHTEEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 April.

LONDON GOVERNMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

HARE COURSING BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

JUNIOR HOSPITAL DOCTORS (REGULATION OF HOURS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have just been watching this procession of Bills. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) has moved the Second Reading of a Bill to reduce the number of hours that junior doctors work. The hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), a Government Whip, objected to the Bill, which is terrible——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Be that as it may, the hon. Gentleman will have to wait until Second Reading to express his views. Nothing was out of order.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is an unusual situation. The Bill has already been passed in another place, where the Government neither opposed it nor objected to it. Is it not unusual for the Government to shelter behind procedure of this sort in order to thwart a worthwhile Bill's passage?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Nothing out of order occurred.

RIDERS OF EQUINE ANIMALS (WEARING OF PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 April.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May I ask hon. Members to make their objections quite clear?

COAL MINING SUBSIDENCE (DAMAGE, ARBITRATION, PREVENTION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

DATA PROTECTION

Ordered,

That the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of standing committees), paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees) and Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the Pension Arrangement of the Data Protection Registrar as if it were a statutory instrument; and that the said Pension Arrangement be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that I heard the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) object to the Riders of Equine Animals (Wearing of Protective Headgear) Bill, but he indicates that that was not the case. Would it be possible to put the Question again?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know not from whom the cry came, but the hon. Gentleman will recall that to put the matter beyond doubt I asked for confirmation that there was an objection and clearly received such confirmation. The hon. Gentleman will also recall that, in the light of that, I asked hon. Members to make their objections clear and beyond peradventure.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was an objection to Bill No. 17 on the Order Paper. I promptly asked the Government Whips which one of them had done the dirty deed and they all denied it. As there was nobody else on the Bench, I should like to know who objected.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am surprised that hon. Members are able to tell me that they have been engaged in conversation across the Chamber while I am on my feet trying to conduct business. I heard the word "object" loud and clear, and we have passed on from that.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 12 April, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)), Motions in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to National Health Service and National Health Service (Scotland) may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours after the first of them has been entered upon; and if proceedings thereon have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall then put the Question already proposed from the Chair.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Malta

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

2.37 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): In discussing our relations with Malta we are contrasting two very different nations. The differences are not just in size, climate, location, religion and life styles, because, related to those factors, there are deep economic and political differences. In this forum it is naturally the economic and political factors on which we should concentrate.

Britain was the first country to industrialise and was the birthplace of fully-fledged capitalism. With such a position came the acquisition of an empire, including the establishment of a Crown colony in Malta in the early years of the 19th century. Although Britain developed its own vigorous trade union and Labour movement, the strength of competitive, individualistic and jingoistic ideas have always been strong here and have had a powerful impact on the norms and values of a wide section of working class people. Hence we have seen, at least temporarily, the triumph of Thatcherism entering into jingoistic activity in the Falklands and pushing forward the power of monopoly capitalism.

Malta is very different from us in such matters, although it has deep bonds with and affection for the British people, has English as one of its two languages and welcomes masses of British tourists to its shores. Everyone will remember its herioc struggle against Fascism in the second world war.

Throughout its history until recently it has been dominated by many outside forces, although those influences have all been assimilated in the rich intellectual and social culture of Malta. Nevertheless, it gained its independence from Britain only in 1964 and its status as a republic in 1974. That is only 25 and 15 years ago, respectively. Malta's struggle for independence was a struggle for democracy. It was a collective activity rather than a process of competitiveness, individuality and selfishness. People worked together rather than against one another.

There is much else about Malta that nurtures collectivism and co-operation. It is a small island about the size of my constituency and that means that the opportunities for direct and representative democracy are much greater than in Britain. Recently the Malta Labour party held rolling conferences to discuss the full agenda before it. Would that we could do that at Labour party conferences in this country.

The island's climate means that the two political parties hold regular rallies which achieve mass attendances. One in six of the island's population were present at a recent rally. The island's deep Catholic religion encourages festive, co-operative and social action as distinct from the Protestant and more individualistic religion which at one time dominated this nation.

Malta is littered with Labour and Nationalist clubs and, unlike Britain, is a highly politicised nation. Some 70 or 80 Labour clubs exist in Malta and Gozo. Even when Labour voters were threatened with hell and damnation by their Church hierarchy, the final stages of which threats took place between 1962 and 1966, they survived within a communal network and Labour later governed Malta from 1971 to 1987. It lost the 1987 election by only one seat.

Over that time, Labour established a welfare state, made significant moves towards public ownership and worker self-management, especially in the important Malta dry docks, and increased the standard of living and social wage of working people considerably. The Labour party in this country looks with envy at the ability of the Malta Labour party to take almost, and sometimes more than, 50 per cent. of the votes. The Labour party in this country has never achieved that.

However, new forces are now threatening those achievements and the collective lifestyle that I have described. Those forces and Britain's role in assisting them worry me greatly. Malta has built up its economy on tourism associated with its considerable construction industry. Its one raw material is rock. It also has agriculture, fisheries, shipbuilding and a protected industrial capacity which must import its raw materials.

Malta is about to face a wave of corrupting, consumer-oriented, capitalist values. They come from outside television stations, especially from Sicily and Italy. They also come from the competitive values of tourism upon which Malta depends. For example, Malta feels strongly about nude bathing although that is imported into the area. Above all, Malta faces the power of international capital and overseas investment with links between this Government and Malta's Nationalist Government.

In an article in the *Financial Times* on 10 March 1988, commenting on the transfer of governmental power to the Nationalists, Mr. Richard Evans wrote:

"the economy is dominated by the public sector, which generates about 40 per cent. of the gross national product and employs 46 per cent. of the work force . . .Malta's Prime Minister, Dr. Eddie Fenech Adami, would dearly like to grab Mrs. Thatcher's axe and wield it energetically."

I would like the Minister to explain whether policies which would seriously alienate half Malta's population are being encouraged and aided by the Government. Already the Nationalist Government's actions have led to widespread demonstrations and civil disobedience in Malta.

Conflict arose over the visit of the "Ark Royal" and other nuclear-capable ships to Malta. Demonstrations and blocking actions were organised by the General Workers' Union which organises 70 per cent. of the trade unionists in Malta. That action prevented the ships entering Valletta harbour. When the ships were turned away they anchored in an area known locally as the "Bay of Defeat" which gained its name at the end of the second world war when the Italian navy surrendered there.

Malta is an unaligned nation and if we examine its position on the map we will understand why that is a practical and pragmatic line for it to take and place in its constitution, as well as a morally correct stance. Will the Minister assure us that we will keep nuclear weapons away from Malta so that its position will not be compromised? Malta's non-alignment and neutrality could also be compromised by joining the European Community and joining a club associated with NATO. Its Nationalist Government is interested in Community membership.

A further difficulty with membership would be the free flow of goods, capital and labour into Malta when the country requires protection for its home industry to sell

within its own market. Foreign investment on a massive scale would mean Malta's small economy being entirely dominated by outside forces and interests—that country having established full independence only 15 to 25 years ago. What advice have the British Government given the Malta Government about EEC entry? What are the Minister's reactions to the points that I have just made?

My final point is of immediate relevance. These days, we are all supposed to support green parties, having the welfare of the environment at the top of our agendas. I doubt the seriousness of the Conservatives' commitment, but at least it exists in theory. Chernobyl showed us that no country can consider itself to be an isolated island, and that certainly applies to Malta. A polluted Malta would hit the Mediterranean and British tourists taking their summer holidays there.

I am deeply concerned about the building by Malta's Nationalist Government of a power station at the Delimara site. We can only be thankful that Malta is too small to qualify for an economically viable nuclear power station, because a nuclear accident could destroy the whole island. I am not the only person who is concerned, because mass demonstrations and acts of disobedience are occurring on the island, including a recent demonstration by 50,000 people out of a total population of 300,000. The Labour leader and former Prime Minister Dr. Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici says that a future Labour Government will have nothing to do with those who provide services in the construction of the power station. Will the Minister say whether the British Government and British firms have, or are likely to have, any such involvement?

What is wrong with that power station? First, as a coal-fired and oil-fired power station, it will require full imports of both materials because they are not available within Malta. The power station's construction, subsequent imports and operation will destroy the fishing and tourist trade in the fishing village of Marsaxlokk, which is the most popular recreational site among the Maltese, who flock there in the summer and who enjoy walks there in the winter months. Eighty per cent. of the area's inhabitants petitioned against the power station's construction.

Next to that fishing village is Birzebbuga and what is known as Pretty bay. It will become a polluted bay if construction of the power station is pursued, with disastrous consequences for the Maltese and for tourists. Its construction is also causing widespread ecological damage, being built on clay foundations at huge cost. It involves the destruction of a large area of good quality arable land, which is not easy to come by in Malta. The plant's massive chimney stacks and ash residues will also create a massive environmental mess.

Due to the prevailing winds, which change direction, any power station must be at the southern end of the island, where Delimara is located. There are much better alternatives. Malta's Labour party has produced plans for a site at Hal Far on the southern coast, where a power station could be built into the rock cliffs, hiding its chimneys, in the area of an industrial estate, with built-in facilities for heating that estate.

On 6 November last, I inspected the Delimara and Hal Far sites, and I am convinced by the case put to me by Daniel Micallef and his fellow Malta Labour Members of Parliament.

I want to put several questions to the Minister. First, what co-operation has there been with the Malta Government in respect of the Delimara project? Secondly, has any agreement been signed with the Nationalist Government of Malta to send British troops to the island if civil disobedience arises there? Thirdly, will the Minister give an undertaking that there will be no interference, direct or indirect, in Malta's internal affairs? Fourthly, will the Government refuse any financial, technical or moral aid for this disastrous project? Fifthly, will they lend their voice to calls for internationally recognised environmental agencies to prepare a study of the proposals by visiting Malta and looking for an alternative site and alternative, non-harmful power sources—an internationally backed experiment in the use of solar power in Malta being one of the options?

2.50 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) for giving us this opportunity of having a short debate about relations with Malta. I know that he has a particular interest in Malta, and has visited the island both privately and as a member of the United Kingdom branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in a welcome formality and congratulate Dr. Censu Tabone, who, having recently resigned as Foreign Minister, has just been sworn in as Malta's president. I am sure that the House will want to wish Dr. Tabone every success in his new office. He has had a remarkable ministerial career, and his appointment is a tribute to the respect in which he is held by his countrymen.

I listened attentively to the hon. Gentleman's speech, which included a brief summary of the history of relations between Malta and the United Kingdom. Let me add that Malta is one of the few countries which entered voluntarily into a relationship with the British Crown. The 1802 treaty of Amiens provided for the Maltese Administration to revert to the Knights of St. John, but the Maltese people petitioned Britain to place the island under British sovereignty. That is a relatively unusual way of establishing such a relationship.

As the hon. Gentleman said, ever since then Malta has occupied a key strategic position. The hon. Gentleman mentioned briefly the heroic record of the Maltese people in the Second World War, which was recognised uniquely in the award by King George VI of the George Cross to the island collectively. That, along with many other things, forms a bond between the people of Malta and those of the United Kingdom.

I was, however, somewhat surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman first say that he called on the British Government not to intervene in Malta's affairs—a principle that I am delighted to reinforce as the basis of our relations with Malta—and then give a long list of matters on which he wanted me to intervene in the government of that independent and democratic country, whose present Government, I fear, may not be to his taste. Just for a moment I thought that he might have transported himself psychologically across the water—I could understand that, in view of the recent weather here—to the Maltese Parliament, and, in his imagination, might be cross-examining a Minister there. To many of the questions that he put, pertinent though they may be to the Maltese labour party, I have little answer. It is for the Maltese

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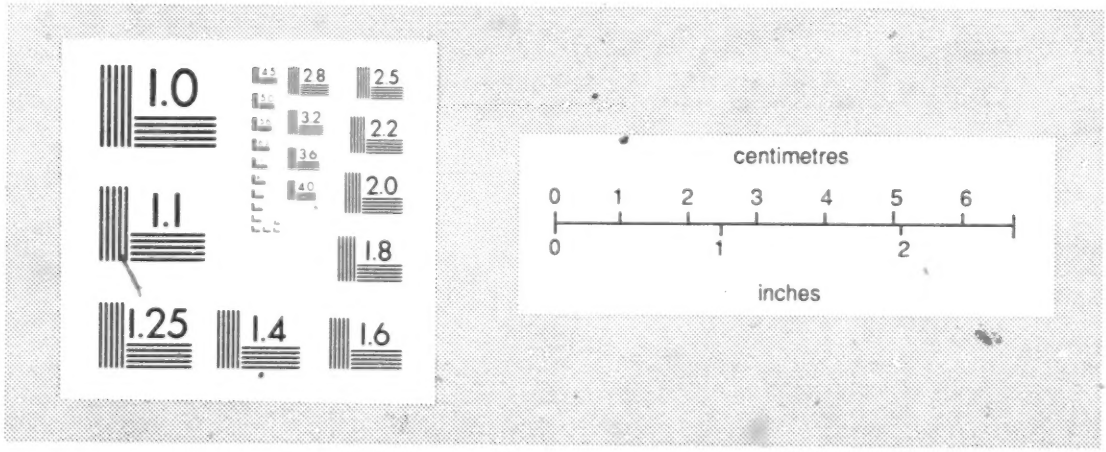

[Mr. William Waldegrave]

Government to make decisions about the establishment —or non-establishment—and the location of power stations.

As a former planning Minister, I know the difficulties. I know that people are unwilling to allow power stations to be sited in certain places. There are always arguments against them, wherever they may be, particularly from those who live nearby. This must be a matter for the Minister of Planning in Malta—I do not know whether he is called that, but he undoubtedly exists. Whoever he is, he has my sympathy, for these are difficult decisions and are never popular. It cannot be for a British Foreign Minister, or any other Minister in the British Government, to make such decisions on behalf of the democratically elected Government of Malta.

Mr. Barnes: Does the Minister grant that there is at least a theoretical distinction between interference in another nation's affairs and assistance and involvement with them, although it may on occasion be difficult to draw the line? I was trying to say that, while some actions would amount to direct intereference in Malta's affairs, others would be helpful and fruitful in assisting the development of the rôle that Malta has traditionally played in the world.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are regimes where there is no democracy. From time to time British Governments, both Labour and Conservative, have taken the view that it is right to protest. The British Government, with the support of the hon. Gentleman and his Front Bench colleagues, have protested about the violation of human rights in Romania because we do not acknowledge that that Government was elected democratically.

The position is different in Malta. Democracy and the rule of law prevails there. Whatever we as individuals or politicians may think about it, we have to respect legitimately taken decisions. If the Maltese Government or a public utility seeks quotations from British companies for work on power stations, it is not for the British Government to stand in the way of British firms. If their tenders are successful, it might lead to jobs for the hon. Gentlemen's constituents and mine. So long as the decision had been properly taken and there was no question of export controls, I should not want to stand in the way.

Relations between Malta and Britain, which have had their ups and downs over the years, are now extremely good. They were stormy at various points, particularly during Dom Mintoff's term as Labour Prime Minister. There is an affectionate and amusing account of the ups and downs of that relationship in the memoirs of Lord Carrington who had a great deal to do with Dom Mintoff when he was Prime Minister, including unscheduled and unexpected visits to Chequers. If he has not already read them, I recommend Lord Carrington's memoirs to the hon. Gentleman.

The "downs" were much regretted by the British Government. Relationships between Britain and Malta became much easier under Dr. Bonnici. They improved to such an extent that the Maltese Labour Government invited HMS Brazen to pay a visit to Malta in August 1986 to commemorate the arrival of the famous relief convoy in 1943. That demonstrated the Maltese Government's willingness to see the old connection revived in some form. HMS Brazen received an emotional welcome by the Maltese people. That is, perhaps, not surprising when one considers the naval links between Britain and Malta, particularly as many Maltese have served in the Royal Navy at one time or another.

The arrival in power of the Nationalist Government after winning the May 1987 general election has seen a further substantial improvement in our bilateral relations. From the very beginning the new Government made it clear that they wished to improve relations with us and to develop economic and political relations with us. Our bilateral relations are now excellent. They involve no interference in affairs, either way. They are warm and getting warmer. There has been a succession of ministerial vsits in both directions.

We were delighted that Dr. Fenech Adami was able to pay a guest-of-Government visit to London in September last year. During his visit he had discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 September when she told him that we would resume our technical assistance programme for Malta. The joint statement was issued after their discussions pointed the way towards enhanced bilateral co-operation. In particular, it covered co-operation to counter international terrorism—that new scourge —the illicit trade in arms, and drug trafficking. Dr. Fenech Adami also had talks with the Leader of the Opposition and with a number of British leaders of industry who are interested in investing in Malta.

Dr. Fenech Adami came to this country again at the beginning of this year to open the international boat show at Olympia, and he had a meeting with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) on 13 January. That demonstrates the warmth of the existing relationship, which I hope is based on mutual respect. It is certainly based on the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of either country.

The technical co-operation programme is now fully operational. Its immediate priority is to help the Maltese to establish a manpower training commission through the provision of United Kingdom training for individual Maltese and by sending British advisers to Malta for short and long-term attachments. As a first step, we have agreed to appoint an expert to help the Maltese set up a computerised profile of the Maltese labour market. We shall follow it up with the provision of a long-term training leader to work in Malta for about a year.

The return of the British Council to Malta is another illustration of our renewed warm relations with the country. Sadly, Dom Mintoff decided to ask us to close the British Council operations in 1978. Following an interval of 11 years, the council has now decided to open an English language resource centre this autumn. After discussion with the Maltese authorities, we have agreed that the resource centre will concentrate initially on liaising with Maltese teachers of English and providing them with back-up advice on the latest methods of teaching English.

United Kingdom-Maltese relations are not confined to Government-to-Government contacts. It would be strange if they were. There is a network of links that continue irrespective of the political climate. To illustrate the diversity of such links, I would mention the Young Vic's successful production in Malta last year of "Remeo and Juliet". Here in London various Maltese artists participated in a celebrity concert to coincide with Malta's official participation at the international boat show in January this year.

Tourism plays an important part in the Maltese

economy and last year 500,000 British tourists visited Malta. That figure represents 60 per cent. of all tourist arrivals in Malta and more than adequately compensates for the imbalance in visible trade. Many Britons have found the attractions of Malta's history, beauty and Mediterranean climate irresistable and have made their homes there. This is a two-way process. Many Maltese, too, have decided to settle in Britain, although perhaps for different reasons.

Trade is also an important factor. Britain is the second largest supplier, after Italy, to the Maltese market. In 1988 we exported products worth £121 million to Malta. Britain is also Malta's second largest export market. I give these figures to show that the ancient and mutually beneficial connections are still very much alive. Famous British companies such as De La Rue and Dowty have large investments and employ many people in Malta, to the mutual benefit of both countries.

I have shown, I hope, that United Kingdom relations with Malta are diverse, deep and friendly. As hon. Members would expect, they in no way compromise the independence of our countries and they take full account of the differing roles that we play on the international scene. Malta is at a crossroads. Her geographical position gives her a special role as a bridge between Africa and Europe. That has been so throughout history.

Mr. Barnes: The Minister has twice criticised—or at least, made sideswipes at—the Labour Government during Dom Mintoff's premiership. They were stormy times. Malta had established its independence of us and turned itself into a republic. It was looking to adopt a nonaligned position in the Third world. Naturally, there was some hassle under Labour Governments during that period but relations were beginning to be re-established not just in the period of Nationalist rule but towards the end of Mintoff's premiership and under the leadership of Bonnici.

Mr. Waldegrave: I certainly did not intend to take a swipe at anyone. Quite a number of those in different countries who had dealings with Mr. Mintoff at one time or another found him to be a man of charm and panache, although sometimes somewhat mercurial and unpredictable. Britain has good relations with many of the non-aligned countries and, indeed, with the founding members of the non-aligned movement. We have good relations with Egypt and India. We have no difficulty in establishing warm relations with Malta—either now or with Dom Mintoff's successor and the Labour party. There is no point in going back over history. We should celebrate the fact that relations now are very warm, and there seems to be no reason why they should not become warmer.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Malta and the European Community. Again, that must be a matter for the Maltese Government. It would be wrong for me to lay down what their policy should be. As far as I know, they have made no formal application to join the European Community, and Community countries and the Commission would obviously wait to analyse the implications of any such application if it ever came. It cannot be for me to advise the Maltese electorate or their Government on the right course for them. They have an association with the Community from which both sides already benefit.

We have been giving support for and finding ways of exploiting the potential of the existing association agreement. During the fourth European Community-Malta Association Council on 20 March, the third financial protocol was signed. It provides Malta with generous access to grants and European Investment bank loans and fully reflects the closeness of European Community-Maltese relations.

The Maltese Government have been active on the international scene. They had a successful presidency of the Council of Europe from May to November last year. In the United Nations they take a particular interest in the environmental matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We co-sponsored with the Maltese a resolution on climate change last year from which a great deal has flowed. Malta made an important contribution to the recent ozone layer conference in London at which Dr. Tabone made a major speech.

It is not for me to intervene in internal Maltese affairs. On the international scene, the Maltese Government have played an honourable role in relation to the environment.

Mr. Barnes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: If there is time to give way to the hon. Gentleman, I am happy to do so.

Mr. Barnes: I asked several specific questions. I have not had time to convey the exact nature of them——

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

London Electricity Board

1. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the London electricity board; and what issues were discussed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the London electricity board regularly and discuss a range of issues of mutual concern.

Mr. Cox: I note that reply, but the Minister must be aware that over many years hon. Members have conducted a campaign with the electricity board, aimed at achieving a more humane and consultative policy to be followed before disconnection of electricity supply. Will the Minister assure the House that, once the industry is privatised, and other organisations are running domestic supplies to consumers, a policy of proper consultation before disconnection of supply will be followed?

Mr. Spicer: Yes, Sir. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance for which he is looking. When the industry is privatised under the terms of the Bill that we shall be discussing later, special provisions of the kind that he requests will be put in place, and conditions will be attached to licences given to public electricity suppliers.

Mr. Harry Greenway: When my hon. Friend meets the chairman of London electricity board, in addition to the important point made by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), will he discuss the need to ensure that all lights in London streets, particularly main roads, are on whenever it is necessary? Is my hon. Friend aware that the lighting in the area of the Target roundabout has gone off or failed many times in the past three or four years, despite my repeated requests that it be kept on?

Mr. Spicer: I was not aware of the Target roundabout problem, but I take my hon. Friend's assurance that there is a problem there. There has been some concern about street lighting connections in the LEB area, but that problem has greatly improved in recent months. Under privatisation, local authorities will be able to contract elsewhere when they wish to do so.

Severn Barrage

2. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assumptions he made as regards availability of pumped storage and capacity in his evidence to the Energy Select Committee in arriving at the conclusion that a Severn barrage could amount to 14 TWH/year of electricity.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Peter Morrison): The assumptions derived from the previous published study by the Severn tidal power group. These are being updated in the current study, which will be published in a few months' time.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. How confident is he of the accuracy of the predictions on which the study is based? Will he ensure that not only the conclusions of the study, but the scientific data on which they are based, will be published?

Mr. Morrison: As I said, the assumptions derive from the previous study. Another study is taking place and the figures produced in the interim report—it is only an interim report—on the Hinckly inquiry were a little more than the figures that I gave, which were 14 TWH per annum. That is interim, and I shall certainly publish what my hon. Friend has asked for.

Electricity Privatisation

3. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what studies have been undertaken by his Department as to the effect of privatisation of the electricity industry on the production of electricity from all other energy sources.

Mr. Michael Spicer: We have framed our privatisation proposals to encourage competitive generation from all sources.

Mr. Cran: Does not recent experience show that the use of fossil fuels in the production of electricity is susceptible not only to interruptions of supply but to variations of price? That being so, should not the non-fossil fuel obligations be used to the maximum after the Electricity Bill is enacted, and reviewed constantly thereafter?

Mr. Spicer: I agree that there have been disruptions in the supply of coal as a result of strikes and variations in the price of oil. That is why we have ensured, through the non-fossil fuel obligation, that a variety of sources of energy will be available, with resulting security for the consumer. We have particularly ensured that renewable sources of energy will be given a special place within the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is privatisation a consideration in the mind of the Central Electricity Generating Board in pursuing its planning application for dry storage at Heysham? Does it think that that is cheaper than reprocessing? Will the Minister personally intervene? We want the material in west Cumberland, where it can be reprocessed by British Nuclear Fuels plc. Is the Minister aware that the people of the Heysham area object and that we in west Cumberland want the material?

Mr. Spicer: I am not inside the CEGB's mind. As the hon. Gentleman said, it is applying for dry storage at Heysham. He is right to say—perhaps we shall be discussing this in greater detail later in the week—that

there are advantages attached to the processing which is proposed at the thermal oxide reprocessing plant in terms of the recovery of uranium and the development of plutonium. However, there must be an application and an inquiry before we can go ahead on that basis.

Mr. Jack: Does my hon. Friend agree that British Nuclear Fuels plc is working hard to take full advantage of the opportunities for nuclear power generation under the terms of the Electricity Bill? Will he join me in congratulating both the management and the unions on the agreement recently struck, which will further the exploitation of BNF's new investment programme at the Springfield works in my constituency?

Mr. Spicer: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in those congratulations. I hope that British Nuclear Fuels plc will continue to be successful.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister agree that the supplementary question by the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Jack), and his answer to it, constitute the most astonishing question and response that one can imagine from a supposedly market-oriented Government? Is the Minister able to confirm that the advice that he is receiving from the merchant banks that are advising him on privatisation is that the private investment community does not want to know about nuclear power and will not pay genuine money for it? Whereas it might be possible to sell the family silver, the Government cannot even give away the family plutonium.

Mr. Spicer: No, Sir. I do not accept that for one moment. When it comes to the establishment of the contracts for the future of the nuclear industry, we shall ensure that they allow for investment incentives and ensure that the consumer has a good deal. There is no question of it being an unattractive proposition financially to sell the industry, especially in the context of the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Wave Energy

4. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further funding he proposes to provide for the next stage of research into Dr. Stephen Salter's wave energy project.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There are no current plans for additional funding for this project.

Mr. Macdonald: Nevertheless, will the Minister undertake to ask the technology support group at Harwell to reconsider the feasibility of Dr. Salter's project? With the benefit of hindsight, does the Minister agree that it was a mistake for the Government to cut off funding for wave energy projects in 1982? Surely Britain should be taking the lead in wave energy development and not allowing countries such as Norway to gain export orders on the back of British know-how.

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman will know that Dr. Salter has been in correspondence and has had meetings with my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who is specifically responsible for such matters within the Department. He will realise that since 1983, about £446,000 has been spent on Dr. Salter's project. I do not believe that there is currently a specific application. Were there to be one, that would be considered in the light of all the other competing priorities.

British Nuclear Fuels

6. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the board of directors of British Nuclear Fuels; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet the chairman and other board members to discuss a wide range of matters.

Mr. Cambell-Savours: When the Minister next meets the chairman and the board, will he put to them that they should take a particular interest in the development of nuclear fission as outlined in the articles by Fleischmann, Pons and others, including Jones in America, and ensure that every effort is made to make resources available for further development of the process? If necessary, moneys should be diverted from the Culham, Oxford laboratories, which are currently undertaking work and which have a substantial sum at their disposal, into a new area of work that may herald a new energy source for the future.

Mr. Spicer: I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of the chairman and the board. I am sure that they will take a close interest in the experiments and will monitor the results, but British Nuclear Fuels is responsible for reprocessing rather than for initial generation.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Minister accept that the additional charges by BNFL to the Scottish electricity boards over the past few years amount to £250 million for the extra costs of reprocessing fuel and the breaking of the Chapelcross contract? What is the Minister's estimate of the impact of these huge additional charges on Scottish electricity bills this year and in future years?

Mr. Spicer: It is certainly the case, and the Government's policy, that British Nuclear Fuels should charge an appropriate cost-related price for its service and that the consumer will ultimately have to pay for those proper costs. Under our proposals, particularly our privatisation proposals in the Electricity Bill, those costs will be much more transparent than in the past, when they have often been disguised.

British Coal

7. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

16. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Janner: Has the Minister discussed with the chairman of British Coal the deep anxiety of Leicestershire's stalwart, skilled coal miners at the steady loss of jobs for miners in the county and the east midlands? Has the hon. Gentleman considered, either with the chairman of British Coal or alone, the Government's

promise even before the last general election to build a coal-fired power station at West Burton, thereby creating 3,000 jobs for coal miners in the area? Is it right to say that nothing has happened? If so, why?

Mr. Spicer: It is not right to say that nothing has happened. The CEGB has filed an application. It must get the approval or disapproval of the planning authorities. As I understand it, discussions are going on between the two appropriate planning authorities—the district council and the county council. I understand also that the one outstanding issue looks as though it will be resolved. If it is, it will be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to determine whether he wants to hold a public inquiry. The process of applying for that power station is well advanced. Until my right hon. Friend can proceed with his consideration of the application, I must hold his position in reserve.

Mr. Hardy: Will the Minister discuss with the chairman of British Coal the need to extend the perception of the conquences of developing coal import dependency, not least through increased coal prices? Would the hon. Gentleman care to express his support for the retention of British Coal's science laboratories at Wath upon Dearne, an area which has suffered severe contraction, where economic need is dire and where this establishment is needed as a signpost for technological development?

Mr. Spicer: British Coal is increasingly aware of the need to be competitive against imports and also of our view that it will be able to compete against imports if the present procedures for improving productivity are maintained.

The hon. Gentleman was good enough to give me notice that he wanted information about the laboratories to which he referred. This is a matter for British Coal, but my understanding, in the short time available to find out about this matter, is that there is no problem about the laboratories' future. If my understanding is incorrect, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Andy Stewart: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met the chairman of British Coal, did he reassure him that on his visit to Russia he would say that we no longer wanted Russian coal in Nottinghamshire and that, it was no more welcome than that from South Africa?

Mr. Spicer: I do not think that any imports are welcome. The question before the Government is whether to allow imports in the interest——

Mr. Blair: What?

Mr. Spicer: I said that no imports would be welcomed by the Government. The question before the Government is whether to allow imports in the interest of bringing prices down, especially prices of electricity to the consumer. We have made it clear that we will allow coal imports. We have also said that with £2 million a day being given in investment to the coal industry, we have done a tremendous amount—more than any other Government—to improve the productivity of the coal industry. If productivity increases at the present rate, British Coal should be able to beat off imports.

Mr. Batiste: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already announced his intention that the coal industry should be privatised after the next general election. Can my hon. Friend give a timetable against which the discussions and deliberations will take place, which will lead to decisions about the shape of that privatisation and, in particular, the need for competition in it?

Mr. Spicer: No, Sir. We have said that it is a matter that we want to put to the British people at the next general election and we do not wish to prejudge their decision. We shall have to make decisions about details in precisely the same way as we did with electricity. We shall make a commitment to privatise coal at the next general election, but the shape and content of that privatisation will have to wait until after the election.

Mr. Jack Thompson: At the next discussions with the chairman of British Coal, will the Minister take the opportunity to raise with him the question of the British Coal engineering workshops? The rundown in manpower and the dilution of skills in the workshops is having an effect on the efficiency and, especially, the safety of the industry. Are there any plans to take out the engineering workshops before any proposals are made to privatise the industry?

Mr. Spicer: The future of the workshops is a matter for British Coal. However, I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's comments are drawn to the chairman's attention.

Mr. Gow: Did the chairman of British Coal confirm to my hon. Friend at their last meeting that there was growing interest and support among miners for the proposal to privatise the industry? Did the chairman report that miners, notably in the Bolsover constituency, were looking forward to becoming owners of the mines?

Mr. Spicer: That point was not discussed in those terms with the chairman of British Coal by my right hon. Friend or myself. However, I can confirm to my hon. Friend that it is most probable that the employees of British Coal will be as enthusiastic about becoming owners of that industry as the employees of all the other industries that have been privatised.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Yes, all right.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that, when I was going through my reselection procedures in the past few weeks, not one miner or representative mentioned ownership or privatisation? They were more concerned that I, along with my colleagues, should make it plain that the Government should stop the chicanery of backing those private Bills which will allow the import of more coal through the Humber ports. If the Government do that, they will be able to stop some of the imports that the Minister wants to stop.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman did not tell us whether he won his reselection, but the implication is that he did. Presumably, he meets different people from those whom I meet, or perhaps people tell him different things. I can assure him that there is every sign that, when we privatise the industry, it will have a great deal of support among those who work in it.

Mr. Holt: Does my hon. Friend care to say whether he discussed with the chairman, British Coal's appalling

record in polluting the beaches of north-east England and the rather benign statement that British Coal cannot do anything about it? Does he agree that British Coal must learn to clean up its act?

Mr. Spicer: I am very much aware of that problem and that British Coal is under increasing pressure to do something about pollution in that part of England. I shall write to my hon. Friend with details, but I understand that there are specific plans on that question which should be coming to fruition.

Mr. Barron: When the Minister and the Secretary of State met the chairman of British Coal, did they discuss the implications of the imports of coal that are likely to come through the Humber ports, the threat to the midlands coalfields posed by the Bills for the Humber ports and the report recently received from members of the Standing Committee that one Bill went through by the Chairman's casting vote? They said that the implications for the coal industry are horrendous and that the Government should take action to protect our indigenous coal industry. When shall we receive a statement from the Government that they are not going to let the wool be pulled over their eyes by cheap subsidised coal but are going to take some action to protect the coal miners in the midlands?

Mr. Spicer: When one is a member of a Government who are still spending £2 million a day of taxpayers' money on the coal industry, one has to be a little careful on the question of subsidy. That is precisely what we are being at the moment—to counteract the undoubted threat of imports, which we recognise and for which we have allowed, by continuing with the process of improving the productivity of British coal. We have good coal and a good industry which should be able to compete against imports, and that is the way we believe it will be in the future.

Pressurised Water Reactors

8. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about technical problems and cost over-runs experienced in the construction and operation of the pressurised water reactors managed by the Brazilian utility Electrobras and about related transmission problems; and what assessment he has made of their implications for the robustness of the case for adopting a programme of generally similar reactors in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I am aware that Electrobras does have some problems with its PWR programme. The CEGB is confident that PWRs built in this country will operate satisfactorily.

Mr. Dalyell: If only because those who want to prevent significant flooding in the Amazonian rain forest have a duty to say where the electricity and power will come from if not from dams, may I ask the Minister if we are in a position to help Brazil and to co-operate with the nuclear power programme between Sao Paulo and Rio? On the question of transmission, has any assessment been made of the difficulties in superconductivity of transmitting energy over a distance of 2,000 miles?

Mr. Morrison: I know that the hon. Gentleman feels very strongly about this matter. When I went to Rio de Janeiro I met the president of Electrobras, and during that meeting we discussed many matters and I suggested that it might be helpful if, when he was next in London, he found the opportunity to talk to our electricity division and to the energy efficiency office. In his second point about transmission, the hon. Gentleman put his finger on the key element—that the vast distances involved in Brazil, as compared with those in this country, for example, mean that there are inevitably difficulties of a different order.

Mr. Moss: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the faulty equipment referred to in the question about the Brazilian utility is French? Does not that endorse the CEGB'S preference for Westinghouse American technology rather than French technology?

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. Brazil and other countries should look very carefully indeed at the sort of technology and experience that we have been able to develop here, in conjunction with other countries.

Redundant Miners

9. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his answer of 27 February, *Official Report*, column 5, if he will now indicate what measures he will take to resolve the problems created by the restart scheme for redundant miners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am now able to confirm that it is our intention to introduce an amending order to modify the redundant mineworkers payments scheme such that receipt of benefits under the scheme will no longer be conditional upon the beneficiary making himself available for work.

Mr. Skinner: I think that the next question must be when will that amendment be brought before the House to ensure that officers at unemployment and social security departments throughout the British coalfields are instructed to stop the harassment that has been taking place? Will the Minister also guarantee that, in the amending legislation, provision will be made for those miners who have lost money—in some cases more than £1,000—to be paid back retrospectively?

Mr. Spicer: Yes, Sir. We intend to take powers to recompense those former mineworkers who have lost RMPS benefits due to changes in the availability for work procedures. The hon. Gentleman was ungenerous enough not to admit it, but employment offices have been careful in the way in which they have dealt with the redundant mineworkers payments scheme.

Mr. Beith: I welcome the Minister's decision and the efforts that Energy Ministers have put into securing the decision. Will he recognise, however, that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment between them have made an absolute mess of the scheme and have caused a great deal of anxiety to men who were told, when they left the industry, that they were doing it a favour by taking retirement when they did and that they were helping to restructure the coal industry? Does he agree that, this decision, though overdue, is welcome?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. The miners were made aware at the time—in the pamphlet issued by British Coal—that availability for work would be one of

the criteria by which they would continue to qualify for RMPS payments. That was always clear; it was never in any doubt. We are amending the rules in the light of the stricter rules accompanying restart. That is all. There was never any question but that they would have to be available for work.

Mr. Eadie: We should be extremely churlish if we did not welcome the Minister's statement. Is he aware that we are glad that he has told us that any proposed legislation will be retrospective? However, will he accept that when the miners parliamentary group met the Secretary of State for Energy and the Minister of State, Department of Employment, we were given an understanding that there would be a sort of ca' canny and no harassment of miners who were involved in what was really a Government error? In view of the hon. Gentleman's statement today, will he assure the House that he will instruct the Departments involved that there should be no more harassment of redundant mineworkers? I heard of two cases this weekend that are an absolute disgrace.

Mr. Spicer: I should very much like to hear from the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) about the two cases. There is every intention that such cases should be treated as lightly as possible and that the miners to whom he is referring should not be harassed, to use the hon. Gentleman's word—I do not think that "harassment" is exactly the right word to use. However, if there are any cases with which he has problems, I shall be happy to hear from him.

Mr. Batiste: Is my hon. Friend aware that whatever the technicalities of the documentation, many miners, especially elderly miners, genuinely believed that they would not be required to re-offer themselves for work and therefore there will be the warmest welcome from hon. Members of all parties for what he has announced? We hope that legislation will be introduced as speedily as possible.

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is right in that there was the perception among some miners that they would not have to be available for work and that they had received some kind of retirement payment. However, leaflets were produced which made it quite clear that they would have to be available for work—the majority knew that—and that has been part of the problem with restart. I take my hon. Friend's point and thank him for what he has said.

CEGB

10. **Mr. Radice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet John Baker, the chief executive of the Central Electricity Generating Board; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet senior members of the Central Electricity Generating Board, including Mr. John Baker.

Mr. Radice: Will the Minister tell the House about an important issue that has arisen from discussions that he might have had with Mr. Baker—that is, the latest estimate of the costs of the flotation of electricity supply industry shares?

Mr. Spicer: No, Sir. Never have any Government made that sort of information available, especially before the enabling legislation has passed through the House of Commons. It would be wrong of us to get estimates and to go into deep preparations for flotation campaigns before Parliament has finally passed judgment on the Bill that would enable us to do so.

Mr. Rost: Will my hon. Friend seek assurances from the chief executive of the CEGB that the privatised generation companies will not inhibit competition by continuing to hoard the 100 or more redundant power station sites that the CEGB has not been interested in redeveloping or refurbishing, but which the private sector is keen to develop with new technologies for the smaller power stations which have planning approvals because it will be difficult to find sites for competitive power stations unless we use those that we already have?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. We have made flexible provisions for compulsory purchase by private power companies should they wish to take over the land that has not been used by the existing operators. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend's words are widely heard.

Mr. Blair: Does the Minister agree that if the costs of selling electricity are the same as those for gas and British Telecom, we are talking about £25 for every household in the country and when that is added to higher prices, to a special nuclear tax and to uncertainty even about security of supply, it is no wonder that the vast majority of people in this country oppose privatisation?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is giving us an overture to what will no doubt be his speech at the beginning of our Report and Third Reading debates later today.

This is the biggest privatisation of all time—and quite rightly so. Many consumers will benefit, and there will be a much increased number of shareholders. One of the Opposition Front Bench Members said that he hoped that the privatisation would be properly undertaken. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it will be properly undertaken and that there will be a proper campaign to promote it.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister recall that during the Report stage of the Electricity Bill his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that a new code of practice on disconnections would be brought before the House, or at least would be notified to the House, before that stage of the Bill had been completed? Can he tell us what has happened to the code of practice, and when we are likely to hear the details of it?

Mr. Spicer: I hope very much that we shall be able to bring the code of practice forward before the House has finished its consideration of the Bill. I shall have to refresh my memory, but I think that that is what was said. Certainly it is what we shall try to do.

Severn Tidal Power Group

11. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive the final report of the Severn tidal power group.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The study by the Severn tidal power group is nearing completion, and I expect to receive a final report within the next few months.

Mr. Banks: While talk of the Severn barrage is not exactly the matter of the moment in pubs in Newham, a good renewable energy source certainly is. Tidal power presents precisely that prospect. Will the Minister say whether the Government are committed in principle to the idea of tidal power? When the report has been received, and before any of the recommendations are implemented, will he make sure that the interests of both Welsh miners and redshanks are well protected?

Mr. Morrison: I am sorry that tidal power is not the chat of the pubs in Newham; I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it is the chat of the pubs in my constituency, the City of Chester, not least because of the Mersey barrage. Indeed, there is great interest in it there. Of course, the final decision on whether the scheme should go ahead will be taken on commercial grounds, as well as environmental grounds, to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, and which, I agree, are very important indeed.

Mr. Stern: Will my right hon. Friend do his best to bring the report forward as soon as possible? While this matter may not be the talk of the pubs in Newham, I can assure him that it is the talk of the pubs around the docks in Bristol, not least because it is hoped that the new opportunities that will be created in Avonmouth by the abolition of the national dock labour scheme will not be stopped by a barrage just outside the port.

Mr. Morrison: As my hon. Friend knows, the speed of a convoy is the speed of its slowest ship. I can assure him that in this matter, I will not be the slowest ship. We shall make sure that as soon as the report reaches us it is put expeditiously in the right places so that everyody can see it.

Acid Rain

12. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the programme to combat the polluting emissions which cause acid rain.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB announced in February the award of the contract for retrofitting flue gas desulphurisation equipment to Drax power station. The board is currently considering which station should be retrofitted next.

Mr. Archer: Has the Minister grasped that it is not only the international relations of this country that are threatened by acid rain, but every industry and every activity that depends upon pure water, and that those waters that have not yet acidified are depending on their buffering effect, which is by definition a diminishing asset? Does he have no sense of urgency about this?

Mr. Spicer: We have a very great sense of urgency. That is why we will comply, and will make sure that our industry complies with the regulations under which there must be a 60 per cent. reduction in SO_2 emissions by the year 2003.

Mr. John Evans: Is the Minister aware that there is growing concern in the Warrington and St. Helens area that the CEGB is backtracking on the proposal to install a gas scrubber in the Fiddlers Ferry power station? Will he give an undertaking that, notwithstanding privatisation, the CEGB, or the privatised company, will go ahead with that scrubber, which is essential if acid rain in the Warrington and St. Helens area is to be reduced?

Mr. Spicer: I cannot say that Fiddlers Ferry will get the next scrubber, because that will be the responsibility of the successor company, PowerGen. However, I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance—the assurance that I have just given the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer)—that the regulation requiring a 60 per cent. cut in SO_2 emissions by the year 2003 will be complied with by the industry. Which existing power stations it decides to retrofit will be a matter for the industry. However, I repeat that the 60 per cent. reduction regulation will have to be complied with.

British Coal

17. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many miners there were in 1979; how many there are at present; and what information he has of British Coal's estimate of long-term trends in future numbers working in the industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: At the end of British Coal's 1988-89 financial year there were 81,739 men on colliery books compared with 233,163 at the end of 1979-80. Numbers for future years will depend on the performance of individual collieries and the success of British Coal in meeting the requirements of its customers.

Mr. Allen: Is the Minister aware that those numbers will decline even further unless the Government take action to prevent major imports of coal? Will he look at the possibility of subsidising exported coal to the same extent as nations such as Russia, South Africa, many South American countries, Poland and Australia, subsidise their exports to this country? Will he introduce some balance into subsidy?

Mr. Spicer: First, I must draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that those reductions in manpower from 233,000 to 81,000, which are considerable, have been accompanied by an almost static production rate, which shows a tremendous, fantastic increase in productivity. Secondly, I remind him of the Government's policy to ensure that that improved performance will continue in future. That continuation will be sufficient to beat off imports. We shall not introduce either increased subsidies on the present levels, which are considerable—we have spent £9 billion of taxpayers' money in recent years, and the hon. Gentleman should remember that when he talks about coal subsidies—or import controls, because that would not be in the best interest of consumers, particularly of electricity.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates (Appointment)

60. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General how many local advisory committees on the appointment of magistrates *(a)* have and *(b)* have not made their membership publicly known; and what further steps he is taking to encourage an end to secrecy in the appointment of magistrates.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): About half the 95 advisory committees had made the identity of their members public by the end of 1988. All committees are required to do so by the end of 1992. The Lord Chancellor and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster are encouraging committees to make the identity of their members public immediately.

Mr. Allen: Is the Solicitor-General concerned about the secrecy involved in these local advisory committees? Will he encourage the committees that have not yet responded, so that the local community is properly reflected by sex, ethnic origin and class? Will he also ensure that he finds out how many freemasons are on the committees, so that they, too, have a fair share of local magistrates?

The Solicitor-General: As I have said, the Lord Chancellor is encouraging the local advisory committees to publish their composition without delay. He is anxious that they should be broadly based and reflect the nature of the local community, as should the broad base of the magistracy itself.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Can my hon. and learned Friend give the age of the youngest magistrate? Could more and younger magistrates be appointed? That would have the obvious advantages that they would serve for a long time and gain in experience, as well as being useful on appointment.

The Solicitor-General: I cannot tell my hon. Friend the exact age of the youngest magistrate, but certainly the Lord Chancellor seeks to procure magistrates from a wide age range, including younger ones, who are more difficult to get because they tend to be more involved in their work. He will certainly take note of my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Legal Profession (Green Papers)

61. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Attorney-General what responses the Lord Chancellor has received to his Green Papers on the future of the legal profession.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): At 31 March a total of 702 such responses had been received.

Mr. Archer: While thanking the Attorney-General for that informative reply, may I ask whether he has now grasped that the Green Papers have succeeded in uniting opposition from a diverse spectrum of opinion? Is he aware that some of us are troubled not because the proposals are too radical, but because it has not become apparent how Manchester school of economics principles will achieve the stated objective of making effective legal services avalable to the wider public?

The Attorney-General: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will have observed, perhaps, that in another place on Friday, my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor said that it was part of the purpose of the Green Papers to stimulate debate and that they had certainly succeeded in that objective. The purpose of the Government's provisonal proposals is to ensure that the public are provided with the most efficient and effective network of legal services at the most economical price.

Mr. Favell: No one should be granted immunity from change—not doctors, not nurses, not dockers and not lawyers.

On the constitutional issue raised by the Lord Chief Justice, will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that the Government will do all that is necessary to ensure the long-term future independence of judges, never forgetting that the Left would dearly like to bring the judiciary within the long arm of the state?

The Attorney-General: The legal profession is certainly not one which expects, requires or seeks to be immune from change.

As to the constitutional requirement of the independence of the judiciary in this country, I can give, on behalf of the Government and of the Lord Chancellor, the most categorical assurance that they hold firmly to that principle, which is absolutely central to the rule of law.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Attorney-General ensure that, whatever may be the final outcome regarding the future of legal services in this country, there will be adequate provision for the confidentiality of letters written by Law Officers about matters related to Cabinet affairs? Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider that he was the fall guy in the Wesfland affair? Does he not feel deeply resentful and angry at the way in which he was used by No. 10?

Mr. Speaker: That has nothing to do with the main question.

The Attorney-General: Far be it from me, Mr. Speaker, to quarrel at this early state of the afternoon with your opinion.

Mr. Ashby: Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept from me that the Green Papers have stimulated necessary debate and that we should be looking for changes in the legal profession only where those are necessary? In the course of seeking advice on the Green Papers, will my right hon. and learned Friend also institute inquiries into the way in which estate agents up and down the country are insisting that people go to them for legal services and for mortgages as well as for the purchase of houses? Will he consider the effect of that policy on small town solicitors throughout the country who are the backbone of legal advice?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said at the beginning of his question with which, of course, I fully agree. It is the key to the Government's provisional proposals that they should stimulate competition, because the Government's belief in competition being very much in the interests of the ordinary citizen, in whatever area with which we are concerned, lies behind these provisional proposals. I believe that what my hon. Friend has said would form the basis of a very proper submission to the Lord Chancellor in response to the Green Papers.

Mr. Mullin: Given some of the people who have come out against the Lord Chancellor's proposals, does the Attorney-General agree that the proposals cannot be all bad?

The Attorney-General: I would welcome the opportunity—although I am surprised that one should be thought necessary—of saying that my opinion is that these proposals are not "all bad".

Mr. Stanbrook: Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that there is adequate consultation with the

members of the Bar whose future careers are involved in this matter, and not give undue credence to the aged opponents of reform in the other place, who are no more representative of the Bar than the other place is of the general public?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend asks that the Lord Chancellor in particular, and the Government in general, shall not give undue credence to any particular expression of opinion. It would not be the purpose of my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor to be undue in any response to what is put to him.

What is required in response to the Green Papers is, as my noble Friend has so often made clear, the fullest and the most frank and uninhibited discussion possible. At the end of the period that has been set aside for consideration of the proposals the Government will consider what the next step forward should be.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Attorney-General aware that at the performance of The Plantagenets at the Barbican the line from Henry VI, Part 2

"let's kill all the lawyers"

gets the largest cheer from the audience? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware just how unpopular lawyers are—perhaps even more unpopular than Members of Parliament? Therefore, will he ensure that they are brought to heel and that when we have a vote in this House it will be a free one?

The Attorney-General: I have just come back from a visit to the People's Republic of China where quite a large number of lawyers were killed not long ago. That country is now trying to recruit about half a million lawyers.

Land Registry

62. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the present number of staff employed by the Land Registry.

The Solicitor-General: At 1 March 1989 the Land Registry employed 11,476 staff.

Mr. Shepherd: Is my hon. and learned Friend aware that, despite an increase in staff, the Land Registry has admitted that there is no prospect of an immediate reduction in the unacceptable delay in handling transactions? Is my hon. and learned Friend satisfied that the current policy of compulsory registration by 1990 is sustainable? Should the time scale be extended, the backlog cleared and then calls for voluntary registration, where appropriate, made?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend may know that, last year, the complement of staff was increased by more than 2,100 and as a result the Land Registry's throughput has increased considerably. Last year, some 6·4 million pre-completion, pre-contract transactions were dealt with —90 per cent. within four days and the remaining 10 per cent. within six to seven days. The problem arises with the post-completion, substantive applications where there has been an average delay of four months. With the increase in staff, those applications are now being worked off quite fast at the rate of about 112,000 since the beginning of this year, over and above the speed at which those applications are coming in. It is reckoned that the Land Registry is on course to achieve a satisfactory standard by March next year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Yemen

69. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the aid programmes to the Yemen Arab Republic and to the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mr. Chris Patten): Our aid to the Yemen Arab Republic came to about £6·9 million in the financial year just ended. The programme comprises assistance for technical co-operation projects, notably in natural resources, and English language teaching, together with training. Assistance has also been provided under the aid and trade provision. In the case of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, our aid came to just under £1 million last year, including emergency relief, colonial pension payments and a small technical co-operation programme concentrating on training and English language teaching.

Mr. Adley: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does my hon. Friend accept that in north Yemen, due to the lack of longstanding links between that country and our own, our aid programme is substantially less than that of most of our European Community partners and that in south Yemen, the needs are great, but, due to the unhappy ending of our previous relations in 1967, our assistance is extremely small? In the light of the Foreign Secretary's recent visit will my hon. Friend consider reassessing our relationship in terms of aid with those countries?

Mr. Patten: We looked at our aid programme in the Yemen Arab Republic and in its next door neighbour before my right hon. and learned Friend's visit and that is one reason why, during that visit, he announced an increase of about £500,000 in the technical assistance programmes to the YAR.

The development of our aid partnership with the People's Republic of Yemen has been held back not only by political factors, but by the lack of a memorandum of understanding on technical co-operation. That has posed administrative problems, but there is a draft memorandum with that country's Government and I hope that they will return it to us as soon as possible.

Dr. Marek: Does the Minister agree that now is a good time to improve relations with the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen? If he does, will he give careful consideration to making a generous donation to the PDRY to alleviate the floods and destruction that have just occurred there?

Mr. Patten: Following the recent floods we have been able to give help of £190,000 to the PDRY for the purchase of two Land Rovers, shelter materials and water purification tablets. I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley); it would help us to develop our technical assistance programme with the PDRY if it would agree a memorandum of understanding with us.

Disasters

70. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, following the Armenian earthquake, he has reviewed Britain's capacity to respond to disasters overseas.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have now carried out such a review and introduced a number of improvements in our operations. These include more staff and disaster management training in the Overseas Development Administration and better co-ordination with other Departments and voluntary agencies in this country involved in disaster relief.

At the international level I have put proposals to the United Nations disaster relief office for improving the co-ordination of the response to disasters.

Mr. Moss: While recognising that this country and many others responded extremely generously, should not the international community do more to prepare in a better way for such disasters, so that it can respond in a more professional and organised manner?

Mr. Patten: I agree with what my hon. Friend said. It is important that, at the outset of the United Nations natural disaster reduction decade, we should put forward initiatives for better co-ordinating our assistance. We have proposed to the United Nations that the disaster relief office should hold an international register of pledges of specific assistance that could be cashed whenever a disaster occurred. I have also told the UNDRO that we are prepared to host a ministerial conference to take forward those ideas. I hope that that will be possible in the next few months.

Mr. Hanley: Is it not true that the British Government and people are extremely generous with emergency aid? Is it not also true that we are greatly respected throughout the world for our quick and positive response to such circumstances?

Mr. Patten: The propositions of my hon. Friend are true. I particularly commend our experienced international charities such as the Red Cross and Oxfam. We have lessons to learn from those charities and—without requiring an excess of Christian humility on their part—they occasionally have lessons to learn from us.

Ghana

71. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British aid to Ghana.

Mr. Chris Patten: The United Kingdom continues to be a major supporter of Ghana's economic recovery programme, for which we announced on 1 March a pledge of a further £20 million of balance of payments finance. This brings the total of our balance of payments support to Ghana since 1983 to £92·5 million.

Mr. Knight: Does [illegible] Friend agree that those figures show that the Government's record of aid to Ghana is excellent? However, does not the success in Ghana show that African countries that follow a sensible reform programme—for example, that suggested by the World Bank or the United Nations—do better than those which do not?

Mr. Patten: Yes. The World Bank and the United Nations development programme have just issued an encouraging report underlining the point made by my hon. Friend. I hope that other countries will draw confidence and inspiration from what Ghana has achieved in the past few years. I hope that they will also follow Ghana in attempting to design good social programmes to accompany the economic reform programmes.

Mr. Boateng: Given the outstanding success of the British Council library and reading rooms in Ghana, will the Minister consider extending aid and assistance to the British Council so that it can open similar libraries and reading rooms in southern Africa, particularly in Namibia, where they are much needed in the run-up to independence?

Mr. Patten: I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about the important role played by the British Council. I am delighted that the amount that it can do in developing countries will have increased during this year. It has an important job to do in countries in the front line in southern Africa, as the hon. Gentleman said, and I am sure that we particularly need to go on training, teaching the English language and providing as much assistance as possible in Namibia as it moves towards independence.

World Bank

72. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider publishing the United Kingdom's voting record at the World Bank.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have considered this question, but have decided for the moment to make no change in the longstanding practice of successive Governments.

Mr. Barron: Will the Minister reconsider that answer in view of the fact that the United States of America not only discloses its voting record in the World Bank but encourages other countries to do so? It seems to me and many others essential that people who ask for help from the World Bank should know what decisions are being taken, because that will help them to put their case.

Mr. Patten: I note what the hon. Gentleman says about the advocacy of the United States in the World Bank. It has not been as successful there as elsewhere, as we do exactly the same as everyone else in the organisation, with the exception of the United States.

It is important to remember that votes in the World Bank board are extremely rare. Our main interest is that the World Bank should be as effective as possible, but, as a matter of course, we consult widely on controversial matters that come before the board—for example, with interested environmental groups.

Mr. Jack: What are the Government doing to encourage the World Bank to develop more environmentally sensitive approaches in its investment policy, particularly on the rain forests?

Mr. Patten: We are doing a good deal to encourage the World Bank and other multilateral organisations to do more environmentally. The World Bank has learnt a good number of lessons in the past few years. We also intend to do more through our bilateral programme in this extremely important area.

Miss Lestor: Will the Minister reconsider his answer about the World Bank, bearing in mind that the Canadian Government have expressed concern that matters should not be shrouded in secrecy and that more information should be available? The United States Treasury Secretary, Mr. Brady, has written to the president of the World Bank about the same issue. Remembering that things that are kept secret by the Government tend to be leaked at the end of the day, is it not important that taxpayers should know how we behave on these important matters in the World Bank, and should not the information be made available?

Mr. Patten: To be honest, the best way of keeping a secret is to make a speech or deliver an answer in the House. It is conceivable that that will continue to be so for this answer, too.

We should not get this out of perspective. It seems to me that, as the recent controversy over the power sector loan for Brazil has shown, when matters of controversy arise there is a good and open debate about them. The members of the Overseas Development Administration who are at present answering the thousands of letters about the proposed loan to Brazil, which I think is unlikely to go forward in the shape originally suggested, would not think that matters had been shrouded in secrecy.

Points of Order

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any request from Ministers about a statement on the entirely new doctrine that it has apparently now become all right for a principal private secretary to the Prime Minister to authorise the leaking of a Law Officer's letter to Mr. Chris Moncrieff?

Have you had any request for an explanation of whether Lord Armstrong of Ilminster knew that there had been explicit approval of a disclosure of a Law Officer's letter when he put forward a report that concentrated on differences of understanding between civil servants? Might he not have been just a little economical with the truth?

My point of order is this: in the style of Mr. Justice McCowan, is it now the case that a principal private secretary to the Prime Minister should carry out the instructions of politicians, even though he knows that those instructions are against the highest traditions of the British Civil Service?

Finally, when did Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell tell their Prime Minister what they had done and what they had approved?

Mr. Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that I have had no such request. These are matters for political debate and not for points of order to me.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I have a point of order which is directly for you, Mr. Speaker, and it is one which I consider to be of such importance. I do not think that an hon. Member who has been here for a quarter of a century or more is suspended simply for the joy of it. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was suspended; it is true that there was a vote on it. I want to ask you a question, Mr. Speaker, because there is no one else I can ask. If later events prove that an hon. Member who has been suspended was telling the truth—and everything indicates that my hon. Friend has been telling the truth about Westland—what can be done about the suspension?

Mr. Speaker: I can deal with that question quite simply. The hon. Member was not suspended for what he said but because he would not withdraw an unparliamentary word.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I apologise for not giving you notice of my point of order, but I expect that the article by Adam Raphael in yesterday's edition of *The Observer* has been brought to your attention because it makes serious allegations about the workings of the House. In the article, a Mr. Charles Miller, of Public Policy Consultants, is quoted as saying that some Select Committee Chairmen had been bought. He says:

"I have found a large number of venal members of Parliament."

The article makes a number of serious allegations, including allegations that some research assistants employed by Members are full-time members of companies that are professional lobbyists of the House. The article is headlined:

"A £10m trade in influence".

It makes serious allegations that I ask you to consider. As there is a range of matters affecting a number of Committees, I should be most grateful if you would consider this matter with a view to requesting the appropriate Committees to interview Mr. Miller and to consider other steps that could be taken to clean up what is being rapidly seen as a corrupt, or potentially corrupt, House of Commons?

Mr. Speaker: Of course I saw that article. I understand that the Select Committee is already investigating this matter and has taken evidence. If the hon. Gentleman has a further point to put about Mr. Miller's allegation, he should direct it to the Select Committee.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday you gave a ruling which no one in the House challenged. It was about the application of the sub judice rule in connection with published sections of the report on Harrods, Al Fayed and Lonrho. We did not challenge your ruling because the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—*[Interruption.]* We are trying to be serious about an important national matter. We did not challenge your ruling, Mr. Speaker, because we had the assurance from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that any such quotations could have prejudiced the fairness of any subsequent trial and because the serious fraud office had said that further disclosure could prejudice its further inquiries.

On the front page of today's *Financial Times* there is a fascinating article by a Mr. Clive Wolman. The article is based on extensive information, including quotations about activities by members of the serious fraud office and officials. We have had the much publicised comment by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about wrongdoing. That comment may have been a political gaffe and a blunder, but we are not making much of that because such things occasionally happen. However, when it is taken in conjunction with what is clearly leaked information that could have come only from the Department of Trade and Industry or from the serious fraud office, it reveals information that would prejudice any future trial.

May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look at the contents of the article and let us know, perhaps tomorrow, whether, in view of what is clearly official leaking from one or other of those two bodies, the ruling that you gave last week should be reconsidered?

Mr. Speaker: I will have a look at the article. It would be difficult for me to read all the newspapers every day. I do my best at the weekend. The sub judice rule is well known. I have nothing to add to what I said about it last week.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When you consider the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), will you consider this point as well? I do not expect you to respond immediately to it. It flows directly from your ruling last Tuesday, which I do not challenge—and I genuinely mean that.

For questions to the Attorney-General on 12 December and 23 January the Table Office allowed me to table specific questions—which were answered—about the report of the Department of Trade and Industry on the House of Fraser and Lonrho. For questions to the Attorney-General on 13 February, by which time the issue had gone to the other place, I was prevented from asking such questions, and so resorted to questions about the serious fraud office.

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

The issue before the other place is whether the Secretary of State misdirected himself. Win or lose in the other place, it is up to the Secretary of State to decide whether to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He cannot be ordered to do so. Therefore, the sub judice rule is being extended. When the other place has made its decision, it does not matter what the Secretary of State decides to do; he cannot be wrong. The law gives him total discretion as to the reference.

When the other place has so decided, will I and other hon. Members be free, as I was in both December and January, to table specific questions about this matter, to be answered at the Dispatch Box? There are no other changed grounds—no proceedings, no prosecutions, no charges. It is simply an internal working document of government for which no legal actions will be pending. I hope that you will consider this point, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Of course I will look into the matter. When the hon. Gentleman tabled his questions before, the matter was not before a court, and in such circumstances hon. Members could table questions. My sub judice ruling last week was well understood by hon. Members. I said that it was not in order to quote from the document. The House will know that, with that proviso, I granted a private notice question on the matter.

Mr. Dennis Skinner: (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been listening carefully to the points of order that have been raised this afternoon. I do not know whether you videoed the programme last Friday. It was a bit boring in parts, I have to agree, but it made an essential statement that needs to be looked at.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked when you would be able to assist him in getting a statement or a debate about the renewed arguments about Westland, and you had to say, "It's nowt to do with me." You were than asked about the takeover of Harrods, which is also in the public eye, and you had to say, "Sorry, I can't help." My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) asked about an article in *The Observer*, which claimed that Members of Parliament who table questions on behalf of somebody can get £200 a time, and you had to say, "Sorry, it's none of my business."

This afternoon, we shall be debating the Electricity Bill, and not one Opposition Member wants that Bill. I doubt whether more than 20 per cent. of our people want the electricity industry to be privatised. If we had a proper system in this cock-eyed place, we would be debating those three important issues and not the Electricity Bill.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman draws attention to an interesting point. Too frequently, points of order are matters of political controversy across the Chamber, as they have been today. I fully understand that, over many years, it has become a practice for the Opposition to put questions such as these through the Chair, but the House knows that they are not really matters for me. I do not think that it would be wise for the Speaker of the House to be given the responsibility of deciding also what business we should debate every day.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Campbell-Savours.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I was rising in my place long before anyone else.

Mr. Speaker: The procedure does not work like that.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to be most diligent——

Mr. Flannery: Disgraceful.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have the difficult task of deciding who catches my eye first, and it was the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I ask you to be most diligent, Mr. Speaker, when dealing with the article, and especially the statement which clearly emanates from the serious fraud office. Will you examine the article on the basis that I intend to table a long series of motions that will bring into the public domain hitherto unpublished material that sets out what happened in Lonrho and what appeared in the Lonrho broadsheet over the past few months during which Mr. Tiny Rowland has been pursuing the Al Fayeds.

Mr. Speaker: First, the hon. Gentleman must submit his motions, and then we shall see what happens.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall now hear the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery).

Mr. Flannery: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is about time.

Mr. Speaker: That is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman. It would be courteous if he were to rephrase that comment.

Mr. Flannery: May I rephrase it by saying thank you, Mr. Speaker?

Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I note that the Leader of the House is in his place. The article which appeared in yesterday's edition of *The Observer* which was written by Mr. Adam Raphael reveals a state of affairs that should concern every hon. Member.

You know as well as I do, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of the lucrative consultancies within the House are held by Conservative Members. Most of the consultancies that are held by Labour Members relate to trade unions. Any other consultants on the Labour Benches should be ashamed of themselves. The article to which I have referred reveals that extremely important individuals on the Government Benches have masses of directorships and consultancies, and that some of them are in charge of Committees. The hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) said that he was taking up these activities for the later part of his life, suggesting that the rest of us do not need to do it. In any event, we do not do it in that way.

Is it in order for me, Mr. Speaker, to ask the Leader of the House to say something about the serious issue which has been drawn to our attention, whether now or in the future? People throughout the country know now that there is something sick and wrong in this place. They know that vast sums are being made by some hon. Members, largely Conservative Members. The rest of us are being blamed for the things that they do. They are making millions of pounds out of their activities.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Leader of the House has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have a busy day ahead of us.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I wish to take up, Mr. Speaker, your reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr Winnick), which concerned something said by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who was recently thrown out of the House. My hon. Friend was thrown out because he said that someone was a liar. If I know that an hon. Member is lying and I wish to say that he is lying, does your action in having my hon. Friend thrown out mean that for all time none of us can ever say that an hon. Member is lying when we know that he is? How can we deal with such an issue?

I understand that it is custom and practice that we do not say certain things in this place. At times I have retreated, as it were, because I have been instructed to retreat. I did not think it right to retreat, but you, Mr. Speaker, told me to retreat, and so I retreated. I do not believe in getting thrown out of the House, and never have done. However, if I know that someone is a liar and he says something that I know is a lie, how can I relate that to the House? Apparently, I cannot table a motion that states that a Member of this place is a liar. How can I deal with it?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members know that self-discipline in the House requires that hon. Members do not impute dishonour to each other. Every occupant of the Chair is reluctant to use the weapon of naming a Member. Most hon. Members, when instructed by the Chair to withdraw an unparliamentary word, such as that which the hon. Member mentioned, do so, and I hope that that will always happen. If an hon. Member wishes to persist in making an allegation about another hon. Member, he must do so by an appropriately worded substantive motion.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. It appears that the Government are trying to secure the receipt of all copies of *The Observer* special edition which was published last week. Incidentally, the print comes off the special edition just as it comes off the regular edition, but the factual content is interesting.

Will we be advised by you, Sir, to hand our copies to the Government? A number of us have received the special copies—indeed, I am doing a fairly good trade in lending mine to Conservative Members, including Front-Bench Members. Are we entitled to keep our special copies, or do we have to return them to the Government?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. I have not seen the special edition either, so perhaps the hon. Member will lend me his copy.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the National Health Service (Functions of Health Boards) (Scotland) Order 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 446) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Orders of the Day

LAW OF PROPERTY (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second Reading Committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Electricity Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), further considered.

Clause 19

POWER TO REQUIRE SECURITY

3.52 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I beg to move amendment No. 116, in page 16, line 22, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'(4) For the purposes of subsection (1)(a) above, reasonable and sufficient security shall be deemed given

(a) (i) where the person giving security is prepared to take supply of electricity through a pre-payment meter; and

(ii) it is reasonably practical in all the circumstances (including in particular the risk of loss or damage) for the supplier to provide such a meter; or

(b) where a direct payment is made to the supplier under regulation 35 of the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 (deductions from income support and other benefits and direct payments to thrid parties); or

(c) the person requiring the supply is prepared to enter an agreement to pay the estimated costs by means of a weekly or monthly instalment plan, the payment to be adjusted on an annual basis to reflect actual consumption.

(5) In sub-section 1(a) above, "security" means any arrangement in consequence of which a public electricity supplier may be assured of payment of money due to him and shall include a deposit given to such supplier or guarantee or charge (whether legal or equitable) in favour of such supplier.

(6) Any dispute arising under sub-paragraphs (4) and (5) above between a public electricity supplier and a person giving or wishing to give security shall be determined by the Director as though it were a dispute falling to be determined under section 21 below.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 115, in schedule 6, page 89, line 38, at end, insert—

'(2A) For the purposes of paragraph 2, (2) (a) above, a person shall be regarded as having made good the default—

(a) where the person giving security is prepared to take supply of electricity through a pre-payment meter—

(i) which is calibrated to recover over a reasonable period any money in respect of which he is in default; and

(ii) it is reasonably practical in all the circumstances (including in particular the risk of loss or damage) for the supplier to provide such a meter; or

(b) Where a direct payment is made to the supplier under regulation 35 of the Social security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 (deductions from income support and other benefits and direct payments to third parties).

No. 152, in schedule 6, page 91, line 6, at end add—

'5A. If a tariff customer has not, after the expiry of 28 working days from the making of a demand in writing by a public electricity supplier for payment thereof, paid all money due from him in respect of the supply of electricity by the supplier to any premises at the provision by the supplier of any electric line or electric plant, the supplier may—

(a) apply to a court for an order granting permission to cut off the supply to the premises, or to any other premises occupied by the customer, by such means as he thinks fit;

(b) recover any expenses incurred in so doing from the customer and

(c) an application to court under this schedule shall be by way of summary procedure.'.

Mr. Bruce: Amendment No. 116 is designed to reduce the incidence of disconnection of electricity customers, and amendment No. 115 is designed to speed up and facilitate reconnection for those who have had the misfortune to be disconnected. Hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee will recollect our considerable debate on disconnections and the wider linked issue of fuel poverty. Somewhat to our surprise, and to the surprise of Conservative Back Benchers, we got an assurance from the Secretary of State that the Government intended to support a revised code of practice similar to that nearing completion of negotiation for the gas industry. The right hon. Gentleman accepted that it was absurd that the code of practice for disconnection in the electricity industry should be less advantageous to the consumer than that which applied in the gas industry.

When pressed, the Secretary of State amplified the position somewhat. I hope that the Minister can give us a little more detail. The Secretary of State finally said:

"Because of the consultations that must take place, the final form may not be settled before the Bill leaves its Committee stage, but it will be settled well before the Bill leaves the Commons. There is a three-month cycle of consultations which may not end before the Committee stage. We expect the licence to be modified by Report stage."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 31 January 1989; c. 614.]

I raised this matter during Question Time and the Minister gave the impression that a final agreement was not yet to hand. I hope that he will accept that it is appropriate and legitimate at this point to press him for some clarification about the terms of the code of practice—to the extent that he is able to reveal them—about the timetable for when the code of practice will be agreed and about how and when it will be incorporated into the licence. It is not wholly satisfactory to be told that the code of practice may be available to us before the Bill finally leaves this House.

If the Bill is unamended in the other place, it will not come back to this House. However, when it goes to the other place, we shall seek to press this amendment. Whatever happens, it will be helpful if the Minister can give us some clarification.

I am sure that the Minister will accept that many people are interested in this matter and want to know what will happen. For the record, it may be worth pointing out that, as the Bill is drafted, there is a significant distinction between the gas code of practice and the electricity code of practice proposed under the draft licence. It is proposed that the electricity consumer should be given only 15 days' notice of disconnection, whereas the gas consumer receives 28 days' notice.

The issue of disconnection ebbs and flows and arguments about the figures in themselves are not especially constructive. The annual rate of disconnections is still about 80,000 which I hope all hon. Members will regard as far too many. There has been some dispute about whether the figure is coming down throughout the country. Some of the figures suggest that the disconnection rate is going up in at least one or two areas, which is a matter for concern. We cannot be absolutely sure that, even to the extent that figures suggest that disconnections are decreasing, it is entirely to do with modified practices as opposed to the good fortune of having had a mild winter, which inevitably reduces the likelihood of disconnection.

It is all very well for the Government to say that the trend is downward and that there is no need to worry

because they will ensure that that trend will continue after privatisation. The experience with the privatisation of British Gas was the reverse: as soon as privatisation came into effect, the number of disconnections increased. That is why a new code of practice for disconnections is being introduced for gas consumers. I am sure that the Minister does not want a repeat of that in the privatisation of electricity because it would be politically embarrassing for him and, of course, far worse for those who suffer disconnection.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the hon. Gentleman take note of the fact that there are just two hon. Members on the Government Benches? We are discussing disconnections and people who will suffer considerably as a result. Yet Conservative Members are so interested in the matter that they will simply come in to vote against the amendment. The general public should take note of that.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Whey I saw the number of Members on the Conservative Benches I thought that I had come lucky in an unexpected raffle for an extra Adjournment debate.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that only three Back-Bench Labour Members are present? The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr Heffer) should not cast stones when he is sitting in a glasshouse himself.

Mr. Bruce: I think that I had better let that pass. I shall say simply that it would be helpful for the debate if more hon. Members were present. We are debating a serious and important issue which affects many people and causes them considerable concern.

We must avoid a situation in which new companies come into effect under the licensing procedures proposed in the Bill, but are not required to adopt a process of disconnection that automatically gives a better deal to the consumer than exists or has existed hitherto. The amendments seek to include specific measures in the Bill to ensure that whoever receives a licence is required to operate a code of practice that will minimise the incidence of disconnection.

4 pm

In that context the obvious factor to be considered is the extent to which lower income groups and poorer people are disadvantaged because they spend proportionately more of their income on electricity. Low-income pensioner households spend, on average, 30 per cent. more on electricity than average-income pensioner households. That makes electricity like an old-fashioned Giffen good. The 19th century example is the potato. As the price of potatoes went up, people bought more, because the potato was their staple diet. They had to ensure that they had an adequate supply, and it was other things such as bread and the luxury of meat that went by the board.

The same applies to electricity. People on low incomes facing increased electricity costs are forced to cut back on other commodities. They sometimes economise on heating, causing great danger to their health and safety, and, regrettably, many of them die of hypothermia as a direct result. Some economise on food, which also undermines their health, or on other near-essential commodities which are nevertheless not quite as necessary as heat and light.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his arguments are particularly relevant to the north-east of Scotland—the area that he and I represent—where charges for heating are about 30 per cent. higher than they are in the south-east of England?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman has anticipated a point that I proposed to raise. He is absolutely right that, in areas such as the north of Scotland where winter temperatures are generally lower, although we have been luckier than usual this winter, people have to spend even more on heating than people in the milder south.

The problem is further aggravated by a number of measures introduced by the Government that squeeze people on low incomes. A direct consequence of the switch from the community programme to employment training has been a significant reduction in the number of home insulation schemes carried out by organisations under the neighbourhood energy action umbrella. SCARF—Save Cost and Reduce Fuel—an organisation in Aberdeen, which covers part of my constituency, is concerned about its ability to maintain a programme that is of benefit to people on low incomes and helps them to be warmer at lower cost. The reduction in such provision increases the burden.

The second factor that has to be taken into account is the introduction of the poll tax or community charge in Scotland this year. The poll tax falls proportionately more heavily on low-income families and will reduce their ability to pay for other essential services such as electricity. People on low incomes tend to depend more on electricity for their heating. Their houses tend to be less well insulated and they tend to be unable to take appropriate action to deal with the problem.

It is interesting, too, that the Government are about to launch a promotion campaign because of the relatively low take-up of family credit, which was designed to help low-income families. Many people have not taken up their entitlement, perhaps because of a lack of information and perhaps because of a reasonable feeling that if a household has wages coming in—particularly if there are two wage earners—it ought to be able to meet the essential bills. People do not like the idea of having to seek additional support and feel that wages ought to be paid at an economic level rather than being subsidised by the taxpayer. The very title "family credit" gives the impression that repayment is required, and that may deter people from taking up the benefit. Perhaps they are unable to service their existing debts and wisely do not wish to go further into debt. All those measures have increased the squeeze on low-income families at a time when they face rising costs.

An additional factor, touched on by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), is that in certain parts of the country heating costs are higher. Yet the heating allowances scheme has been abolished in favour of the much less generous incorporation into the normal benefit process and a severe weather payment which has not been invoked since its introduction because we have had a mild winter. No one has benefited from those arrangements.

[Mr. Bruce]

The situation is serious. We must introduce measures that give people a fairer deal in relation to disconnection. The Government say, "We resent the implication that we are responsible for inflicting disconnections." Yet in a variety of ways the Government's policies are hitting low-income groups and making it harder for them to pay electricity bills. That makes it more likely that they will get into difficulty and, under the existing code of practice, increases the likelihood that they will be disconnected. We must make a stand and prevent that happening.

The final factor to be taken into account is that privatisation will result in higher electricity prices for the whole population, and especially for those on low incomes. Even the Government acknowledge that that will happen in the short run, and many of us believe that it will happen in the long run as well. Electricity prices have already been increased unnecessarily and unjustifiably. Again, the situation is worse in Scotland than in England and Wales. In Scotland, the increase in electricity prices has been higher than the average rate of inflation, with no justification, other than that the companies—now the boards—are preparing for the privatisation requirement. That will force up electricity prices in Scotland—from the lowest in the United Kingdom to the highest in the United Kingdom. Such burdens on lower income families will mean an increase in the risk of disconnection and the hardship associated with it.

The amendments represent essential improvements to the Bill to ensure a specific agreed workable means of preventing disconnection wherever possible. I have not suggested a more radical measure, such as that in operation in Wisconsin, where all electricity supplies are reconnected on 1 October regardless of the customer's outstanding debt because of the importance of giving people heat and light throughout the winter. There should be no disconnections during the winter. I have refrained from making such a suggestion because I felt that the Government might be inclined to resist it. Instead, I have tabled practical and reasonable amendments which propose a code of practice within the law to prevent disconnections.

Obviously, the best solution is the use of prepayment meters. They enable people to pay as they go and remove the uncertainty of credit. People can see how fast they are using electricity. Meters can be adjusted by agreement to take account of any previous debt. For many, meters represent the best way to pay, particularly now that new meters have been introduced to reduce the risk of people breaking in, forcing the mechanism and running away with the money—or, in the case referred to last week, the washers—that they may find in the meter. If a person is prepared to take a prepayment meter, and if it is reasonable to provide such a meter, if direct payment has been agreed—from the social security office or by standing order—or if a person has agreed to pay a deposit, there should be no question of disconnection. If someone disconnected under the existing arrangements agrees to the proposals, he should automatically be reconnected immediately.

Our objective is to prevent disconnections, and that is why amendment No. 116 is so important. The argument is overwhelming. The increase in fuel poverty that the Government are imposing on people on low incomes is intensifying and, as drafted, the Bill would increase the possibility of hardship. The amendment is reasonable, practical and workable, and I hope that the Minister will accept it.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): First, I should like to comment briefly on the absence of Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) will remember our debate in Committee on fuel poverty. From the beginning of the sitting at 10.30 am until 7 pm every Tory Back Bencher who spoke defended the code of practice, only to be wiped off the floor when the Secretary of State spoke later. Perhaps Tory Members are not too keen on having a re-run of that in this debate.

The amendments pursue a number of the issues that we raised in Committee and seek to ease the burden of fuel debt for badly off consumers and to ensure that no one's fuel supply is disconnected because he or she is unable to meet the fuel bill.

People are fuel-poor for several reasons. Obviously, income plays a major part. People on low incomes have great difficulty in providing themselves and their families with enough heat to keep warm and enough power for adequate lighting and hot water. Unfortunately, those whose bills are the largest and the most difficult to meet tend to live in homes with no insulation, damp proofing, double glazing or central heating. In the long term, it will be only through a policy of bringing all homes up to insulation standards, as well as ensuring that everyone has an adequate income, that we will make inroads into solving the problems of fuel poverty.

It is important to stress that now, because, as a result of changes in employment regulations, the different funding of projects through the Manpower Services Commission and the changes made to employment training, unfortunately many schemes that had been useful in helping people who live in poorly insulated homes to fight fuel poverty have had to be stopped in the past six months.

However, at least at the moment we can ensure that people do not have to live without heat or power. Living like that is a miserable experience which causes great stress to individuals and families, as well as depriving them of warmth and light. I am sure that in this day and age and in this country, which is energy-rich in coal, oil and gas, there should be no need for people to suffer fuel poverty.

We are anxious to avoid the massive increases in disconnections that followed the privatisation of the gas industry. As the House knows, since that privatisation disconnections have risen by 30,000 per year.

In Committee, we were pleased that the Secretary of State finally agreed with us that the present voluntary code of practice, which had been defended by many of his hon. Friends, has not proved adequate and has not protected consumers who need protection. The Secretary of State told the Committee:

"there are good grounds for moving to the system that Mr. McKinnon"

—the director of Ofgas—

"is recommending for gas . . . we shall add a similar clause to the licence. It will be a better arrangement."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 31 January 1989; c. 607-8.]

It was on that basis that we withdrew all our amendments on fuel poverty to this section of schedule 6. The Secretary of State gave the Committee an assurance that the House would see the proposed clause. He said that he hoped that that could happen before reaching this stage of our proceedings on the Bill but, unfortunately, he has

notified us that that cannot happen because Mr. McKinnon is revising his proposals in the light of the consultations that he has held since the original publication of the modification for the licence.

4.15 pm

The major weakness of the original proposals—I assume that the Secretary of State as well as Mr. McKinnon is considering this—was that the additional protection would be available only to those who made contact with British Gas. Advice agencies have expressed their worry that those who do not make contact—out of fear, because they are unaware of the need to do so, because of language or literacy problems or because they have no experience of dealing with bills—will fall into even greater debt and suffer disconnection. All hon. Members who have ever dealt personally with those who have been disconnected or who are in default with electricity boards will know that such people normally fall within the categories that I have outlined.

There has also been no clarification about with whom contact should be made or how, whether it should be in person, in writing, by telephone, to the accounts department or to a showroom. A customer may believe himself to have made contact, but that will not prove sufficient. For all those reasons, we would prefer that the additional protection that will be afforded customers will not be dependent on their making the contact. In any case, at least the "who" and the "how" should be defined and the administrative procedures explained.

The proposed modification still leaves the question of access to pre-payment meters rather vague. We were told by the Secretary of State that electricity consumers would have a new right to demand a pre-payment meter, but that appears to be only at the point of disconnection or in lieu of a deposit. It is absolutely right that pre-payment meters should be provided as an alternative to disconnection, but there is no reason why a consumer should have to reach that point before being able to make such a choice. Every consumer should have the right to choose to have supply through a pre-payment meter at any stage. Wider availability of such meters would help to prevent the build-up of debt. Problems arise when one cannot meet one's quarterly bill, and one way of avoiding that problem is to pay for one's electricity as one goes along, by means of a pre-payment meter.

We are pleased that the Government are at last making some moves on the issue of disconnections and are no longer simply asserting that the voluntary code is suifficient in either its content or application. However, it would be even better if a full and comprehensive code of practice were written into the Bill. We attempted to do that in Committee, but, of course, it was not accepted. Such a code of practice would make clear the rights and obligations of both consumers and suppliers and would enshrine the principle of a right to warmth and light. That is what we hoped would happen, but, unfortunately, the Government were not able to accept it. We hope that the measures that will be brought forward and written into the licence will achieve Mr. McKinnon's aspiration of making disconnections a thing of the past. We urge the Secretary of State to adopt our suggestions.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Gordon will want to press his amendment to a vote. If he does, the official Opposition will support him.

Whether or not the Secretary of State meant to say what he did in Committee, we believe that he must take action so that even if a code is not included in the Bill, there will at least be a code in the licences to give direct specifications to the supply boards about how they should treat customers who have fuel debt and about the availability of pre-payment meters. Such meters should be available throughout the country, not just in some area or supply boards.

We hope that the Minister will show some good will and that that will happen. We said in Committee that we did not wish to divide the Committee, and we do not wish to divide the House on this issue. However, as Mr. McKinnon said of gas, we hope that electricity disconnections will become a thing of the past.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) is right that pre-payment meters will not be available on demand except as a substitute for a demand of security. However, under clause 21 the director will have powers to arbitrate if he thinks that there is any unfairness in any dispute where there is demand but where the company does not wish to give pre-payment metering, if he thinks that pre-payment metering would help people.

In answering both the hon. Member for Rother Valley and the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), I shall speak only briefly now because we have already had lengthy discussions on this subject. The number of disconnections has been falling, by and large, throughout the country over a three-year period. Therefore, although I do not think that the hon. Member for Gordon was relating disconnections specifically to weather conditions, I should like to put on the record that I do not think that it is right to do that.

On the understandable question that the hon. Member for Gordon asked me at Question Time and to which he has again referred, we have not yet been able to bring forward the licence conditions that will apply to the problem that he has outlined. I confirm what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the Committee; these codes will be the subject of licence conditions. There is no doubt about that. But, as the hon. Member has said, and as my right hon. Friend said in Committee, we want to make sure that they are absolutely on a par with the code that is currently under discussion between Mr. McKinnon and British Gas.

The problem that we face is that there has been a round of consultations between Mr. McKinnon and the industry, as a result of which he is making proposals further to strengthen the conditions. We do not want the conditions that we attach to licences for the electricity industry to be in any way weaker that those in respect of gas. The only issue at the moment is to make sure that the two sets of conditions are comparable—preferably indentical. The wait for the outcome of the gas discussions is all that is holding us up at the moment. That is why we have not been able to bring the conditions forward for this stage of the parliamentary deliberations. Certainly, we shall want to do so before the Bill receives Royal Assent. I hope that what I have said amounts to a substantive answer to the hon. Gentleman's legitimate concern about this matter.

Amendment No. 116 suggests that where there is some form of payment arrangement, that arrangement provides security. Manifestly it does not. It is not an alternative to prepayment as a form of security. Therefore we cannot accept amendment No 116. Nor,

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

I fear, can we accept No. 115, because the industry and the Government already accept the principle that if a payment arrangement allowing both the recovery of an outstanding debt and payment for future charges is entered into and is kept, disconnection should not be necessary. That is clearly set out in the industry's voluntary code of practice on the payment of bills. The public electricity suppliers will be required, as a condition of their licence to produce a code and to agree it with the director. Thus, I think that the spirit of amendment No. 115 is met.

In relation to amendment No. 152—indeed, this is implied in amendments No. 115—we cannot accept the idea that the existence of a pre-payment meter itself constitutes some sort of security that debt will be settled. Manifestly, that is not the case. The substance of amendment No. 152 was referred to in Committee. I think that it was I who pointed out that 15 working days are allowed for payment of bills and that this reflects existing practices within the industry. In England and Wales, some 166,000 consumers are billed monthly, so the 28-day condition is not appropriate for them.

The second part of the amendment leads me briefly to remind the House that, for the first time, the supplier will have to go through a formal procedure before he can disconnect a consumer. In any case, there can be no disconnection where there is a genuine dispute. In addition, under the licence, the public electricity supplier will be obliged to produce a code of practice on payment of bills, including arrangements, for people having difficulty meeting their bills. While I am unable, at the moment to give the details of the conditions, I can say that it is intended that a distinction shall be made between those who cannot pay their bills and those who will not pay their bills. That is a perfectly fair distinction to make.

I think that we are meeting what all sides of the House undoubtedly want, which is that pre-payment meters should be available as an alternative to security; that where people want a pre-payment meter, but are not offered one by the supplying company, the director shall arbitrate; and that there shall be written into the licences a code of practice that will ensure that all this is done fairly and in the best interests of consumers.

Given that that is the spirit behind the amendments, and behind the Labour party's pronouncements on this matter, I very much hope that the hon. Member for Gordon will not press the amendments.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying the position on the code of practice. It is a little disappointing, although I understand the reasons, that it is not possible to shed any more light on the nature of the code of practice that we discussed in Committe. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) has pointed out, quite rightly, that there was not much support from the Secretary of State's own side for his commitment to an improved code of practice. Possibly that is because he had not told his hon. Friends his view before he entered the debate at the end. There is a feeling that some Conservative Members are less than sympathetic to the need for this kind of code of practice. However, I accept that the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary are not in that category that they are determined that the agreement in respect of gas should be applied to electricity.

Mr. Barron: We should not jump to too many conclusions. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) will recall that the Minister said earlier that there was no question but that this would be written into the licences. Well, it was not in the draft licences. We can only assume that at that time the Government were going to let the industry draw up its own supply codes. It is because of what happened in Committee that a supply code will be written into the draft licence.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is very interesting that in Committee the Secretary of State was clearly somewhat stung by the attack—though perhaps that is an internal matter for those who were present. Perhaps he decided on the spot that the Opposition's arguments were correct. Perhaps he decided that the suggestion that there should be a worse code of practice for electricity consumers than for gas consumers was ludicrous and indefensible, and determined, at that point, to do something about it. I accept that he is still committed to that position, but he has not actually come up with the answer. Obviously, that makes the position a little difficult for us at this stage.

The Minister took issue with me on the question of security. I feel that the reference to security is a sufficient undertaking to the supplier. The amendment says:

> "'Security' means any arrangement in consequence of which a public electricity supplier may be assured of payment of money due to him and shall include a deposit . . . in favour of such supplier."

It seems to me that that is a pretty clear definition of "security"—meaning that the supplier will get his money, and that there is an adequately agreed method: by paying a deposit up front, or by going for a meter, or by some mutually agreeable standing order arrangement, both sides having the right to appeal to the director.

As the Minister will appreciate, I do not claim total credit for the amendment or its contents. It has been thought through, and I believe that it would write into the Bill a specific defence for those who face the possibility of disconnection. I should like to give the lie to, or lay to rest, any suggestion that I or my colleagues, or any Opposition Member, is interested in enabling people who can pay their electricity bills to get away with failing to do so. I believe that the wording of the amendment takes care of that. People in that category could be forced to pay a deposit, or to set up an unbreakable standing order, or to provide some other kind of security. But people who cannot pay would have the option of a meter or a direct payment, such as is provided by the fuel direct scheme, from social security. That seems to me to be a very considerable improvement on the present arrangement, and will ensure that the supplier gets his money—which I think is quite reasonable, even though suppliers' charges are too high—and that the customer is able to keep up with payments because they are geared in a way enabling him to pay as he goes along and to monitor both the cost and the level of consumption.

I hope that the Minister will accept that I am not being churlish when I say that I wish to divide the House. I believe that we do not have a firm enough position on the record. If the amendment were included, it would improve the Bill considerably. It would in no way be incompatible with the code of practice, but rather it would help to stiffen the contents of the code of practice that we have not yet seen. The issue is sufficiently important to divide the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—
The House divided: Ayes 146, Noes 226.

Division No. 147] **[4.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Menzies Campbell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and
Mr. John Mark Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 20

SPECIAL AGREEMENTS WITH RESPECT TO SUPPLY

Amendments made: No. 17, in page 16, line 29, after '19', insert

'and (*Additional terms of supply*)'.

No. 18, in page 16, line 47, after '19', insert

'and (*Additional terms of supply*)'.—[*Mr. Michael Spicer.*]

Clause 21

DETERMINATION OF DISPUTES

Amendments made: No. 19, in page 17, line 7, after 'to', insert

'19, (*Additional terms of supply*) and 20'.

No. 20, in page 17, line 16, after 'to', insert

'19, (*Additional terms of supply*) and 20'.

No. 21, in page 17, line 18, leave out from 'section' to 'may' in line 23 and insert

'the Director may give directions as to the circumstances in which, and the terms on which, the supplier is to continue to give the supply pending the determination of the dispute.

(3) Where any dispute arising under section 19(1) above fails to be determined under this section, the Director may give directions as to the security (if any) to be given pending the determination of the dispute.

(3A) Directions under subsection (2) or (3) above.'.—[*Mr. Michael Spicer.*]

Clause 23

ORDERS FOR SECURING COMPLIANCE

Mr. Michael Spicer: I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 18, line 3, leave out

'has contravened and is likely again'

and insert 'is likely'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos 23 to 25, Government amendment No. 27 and amendment No. 191, in clause 46 page 35, line 45, at end add—

'(e) include a financial statement surveying costs for each area board during that year.'.

Mr. Spicer: I merely want to say, by way of proposing the amendments, that there was some discussion about these issues in Committee. I believe that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) in particular argued that the director general should have powers to take action if he has clear reasons for believing that action contrary to licence conditions is likely to be taken. If the amendments are acceptable to the House that point will be met. The director general will be able to take action if he has legitimate reasons for believing that action contrary to licence conditions is likely to be taken.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): The purpose of amendment No. 191 is to ensure that, when the director general makes a report to the Secretary of State—as under clause 46 of the Bill he will be obliged to do—on his activities during the year, he includes a financial statement surveying the costs for each area board during that year. It is entirely appropriate on this day, when we will be debating a series of amendments concerning the rights and needs of consumers, that we ask what price the consumers will be required to pay for this legislation. At the end of the day—no matter how many discussions that people who are fond of debating the industry structure may wish to have—what the ordinary consumer will ask is, "Will privatisation improve the service and will it bring down bills?"

The boast of the Secretary of State about this legislation was that this privatisation is somehow different from gas and British Telecom because there is no monopoly. The criticism that was implicitly acknowledged by him was that gas and British Telecom had gone wrong as privatisations because there was a monopoly element in relation to consumers. However, for the vast majority of consumers, that is exactly what has happened here. The consumer will deal with the same electricity board as now, with no ability to transfer custom if he is dissatisfied with the service, and with no opportunity to hold the electricity board publicly accountable, because it will no longer be publicly owned.

4.45 pm

If we have learnt anything from privatisation, it is surely that, when one turns a public monopoly into a private monopoly, one combines in the worst way possible public service and private profit. One has the need to use without the right to choose. That will exactly describe the plight of Britain's 22 million electricity consumers following privatisation.

When we examine what the Bill includes for consumers, we must point out first that there will be no choice in relation to the area board used and that, of course, the grid system will be a monopoly owned by those area boards.

The only element of competition comes twice removed from the consumer in generation. Yet I believe that, if the Committee stage of the Bill accomplished anything, it exploded the notion that the duopoly that will be created —big G and little G owning the generating capacity—will make it at all likely that there will be any true competitive element operating within the scheme. In other words, as it became increasingly apparent during Committee, the Government are driven to rely on the public sector regulator to give any credibility at all to their notion of public accountability.

We have been told of all the independent power projects that are due to flood the system. We have consistently asked for details of the 20 power projects that the Government say are awaiting us in the new privatised structure, but we have not yet been given them. At one point in Committee I thought that we might have been promised them, but perhaps we can have them now. I suspect, however, that on examination many of those projects will turn out to be nothing more sophisticated than bids by various fuel suppliers or power plant builders to ensure that they are in on the act after privatisation.

The Secretary of State continually said throughout the Committee proceedings that this was no longer a cost-plus system. I suppose he meant by that that we were no longer in a situation where the costs would be simply passed on to the consumer. Yet it is extremely difficult to envisage how that is not the case. Most of the contracts for power generation will be long term. Many will be on a take-or-pay basis. If the regulator is involved at all, he will be involved when those contracts are first concluded and agreed.

The licence agreement that governs the area boards in what they charge the consumer will operate according to the formula RPI minus X plus Y. We do not know what X is, we do knot know how Y is formulated, and we find in the licence conditions that, even after the formula has been set for the area boards, they will be permitted to exceed it by what is called in the licence "the permitted percentage". That is an excess by which the area boards will be able to exceed whatever targets the regulator sets. Yet again, when we look at the licence to discover what the permitted percentage is, another blank appears. So often in our debates, when we get down to the detail of what awaits the consumer after privatisation, we face a blank. The truth is that this is a bill without any specific charges in it at all.

If we wanted any proof as to what will happen to prices after privatisation, the proof is with us already—it was 9 per cent. last year, because of privatisation raising the rate of return, and 6·5 per cent. this year. We now know that the rate of return will be raised from 5 to 8 per cent. for nationalised industries. I suspect that that is to provide the colour of an excuse, so that area boards and the privatised electricity industry will have written into their regulatory structure a minimum rate of return of 8 per cent. Perhaps the Minister and the Secretary of State can confirm that. If the Secretary of State is right—although we can never be sure when dealing with figures whether he is right or wrong —he is talking about £30 billion of investment over the next few years, at an 8 per cent. rate of return. That will have a dramatic upward pressure on prices. In relation to the nuclear industry, we know that the higher the rate of return, the higher the nuclear tax that consumers will pay for nuclear power.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Does my hon. Friend appreciate—does the Minister appreciate—that during the past three years the CEGB's costs for the nuclear fuel cycle have increased by £460 million? That is a 53 per cent. increase. Who will pay for that—the consumer?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that rise. He is also right that it will be the consumer who will pay along with the taxpayer, as we shall see later.

The irony of the Bill is that, whereas the profit from the electricity industry moves to the private sector, much of the risk and liability stays in the public sector. The Government can no longer seriously maintain that prices will fall. Although it is true that back in the heady days of 1987 when the Secretary of State was first talking about the proposals he wrote an article in the *Daily Express*

"How I am going to cut your electricity bills".

We get little from the Government even to remotely suggest that bills will come down. Instead they have mounted a fairly defensive exercise to say that bills will not go up as much as Labour says.

The truth is that replacing the downward pressure on costs—that was the slogan of the Government—is an inexorable upward pressure on costs as a result of privatisation. The Government's only real hope of prices falling after electricity privatisation lies in fuel costs coming down. In other words, something entirely extraneous to the process of privatisation. That is the only vestige of respectability that the argument for falling prices has left.

I have often said that one of the extraordinary things about the Bill as it moves through the House is that whether the discussion has been about prices, the nuclear tax or the costs of flotation, even the least curious Conservative Members would want to know what it is going to cost their constituents. The cost of flotation is a prime example of that.

The analysis we provided in Committee suggested that the cost of flotation, as a percentage of the proceeds, would be about 5 per cent. If that calculation is repeated on figures such as those given in the newspapers regarding what the industry will fetch on the market—about £18 billion—we are talking about flotation costs of about £900 million, which represents a £25 premium or special additional surcharge on every household in the country.

Yet we have been consistently denied any explanation from the Government as to whether they think that that calculation is wrong or wildly inaccurate. They have given no estimate themselves as to what they consider to be the costs of flotation. If they say, "We never normally provide that" then perhaps it is about time that they did. Surely that is one of the things that we are entitled to take into consideration when deciding whether to support this Bill.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Does my hon. Friend realise—it was published quite recently—that because the Bill is doing so badly the Government intend to spend another £20 million on advertising?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If £20 million were the sum total we would consider that we had got off fairly lightly, but, unfortunately, that is not so. The CEGB has allocated £76 million this financial year to be spent on privatisation—this does not include the cost of the flotation itself; it is all pre-flotation costs. That does not include the promotion costs of the flotation or,

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perhaps most important, any of the costs of the area boards or of the national grid as a result of privatisation. That is why it is right to ask for figures from the Minister so that we know exactly what we are up against.

One interesting aspect of the presentation given by Mr. Baker to electricity board managers a short time ago was a document presented by Lazard Brothers, who are advising the new National Power—big G—on the financial aspects of the privatisation. That document says quite clearly exactly what we can expect as consumers and taxpayers from privatisation. It states:

"The challenge to be faced in the reorganisation of the industry cannot be overstated. A restructuring of this sort so close to flotation is unprecedented in its scale and complexity . . . the reorganisation of the electricity industry raises fundamental problems of logistics."

It also states that a considerable marketing exercise will be required to establish the commercial credibility of the new National Power company. All of this, helpfully admitted by Lazards, will be paid for by us, the consumer and the taxpayer. We shall have advertisements promoting a sale that no one wants. That is what is so wrong with this privatisation.

We have had opinion polls that show almost 70 per cent. of the population oppose the privatisation, as they oppose water privatisation. The Government made no effective attempt to persuade public opinion during the Committee. They believe that if they have a majority here that obviates the need to explain to people why they are carrying on with this privatisation process. The answer is that they are doing it for no other reason than privatisation itself.

This essential public service that we all need to use will be privatised at enormous cost to the consumer and the taxpayer at a time of immense uncertainty in the industry. There can be nothing more irresponsible than to embark upon that process, but I am afraid that there is nothing more typical of the Government.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I suppose that any Government are obliged to give serious consideration to the values or dogmas that they hold dear. However, they also have an obligation to the nation to see that the application of those dogmas is not prejudicial to the interests of the community and the country. Unfortunately, there is cause for grave concern about the effects of Government policies on the price of the electricity paid for by the domestic consumer and by industry.

Since the introduction of the Bill I have had a number of discussions with people engaged in the special steels industry. Only the other day I met people from the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation—men who work in the Rotherham works of the engineering steels industry, who are represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther) and myself. We meet representatives of that industry frequently and high on the agenda is the price of electricity. In our area we produce steel by the electric arc method and the price is significant.

Those steel workers who were worried about the price of electricity have, during the past decade, broken world record after world record. They take pride in the superb achievements of their works and the knowledge that their skill has made them most competitive. They deeply resent the fact that, last year, there was a 9 per cent. increase in electricity charges followed by a 6 per cent. increase this year. Those price increases could take the competitive edge off their industrial endeavours.

They are conscious of the fact that if we are to build from the ashes of deindustrialisation that the Government have inflicted on the country during the past decade, industries with the potential to export should be able to expect Government assistance and encouragement rather than the introduction of enormous economic strategic disincentives.

For example, I calculated that last year's electricity price increase would make a 4 per cent. increase in the cost of our steel production inevitable. When the special steels industry of Britain is competing with that of Germany, Japan and other steel producers, it is nonsense for the Government deliberately to embark on a policy that forces up the industry's prices and takes off its competitive edge. However, that is what has happened.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) virtually invited the House to look at the realities of this increase. When the 9 per cent. increase was imposed, the Secretary of State—who I know cannot be with us, but I doubt whether he or the Under-Secretary could deny this—made it absolutely clear that the increase was necessary to provide the electricity industry with an investment capacity. However, the industry had already budgeted for an investment of just over £1,000 million, of which the Secretary of State for Energy appeared to be unaware. He said that we had to make an increase in excess of £1,000 million so that the CEGB could invest.

5 pm

The Minister knows that, in Committee, I made a number of attempts to secure from him the actual record of investment following that 9 per cent. increase in prices. Capital expenditure by the electricity supply industry in 1987-88 was £1,089 million and that approved in 1988-89 was £1,474 million—little more than the amount that would have been spent by the industry without the 9 per cent. increase in prices. The amount planned for next year is little more than would have been fulfilled by the electricity supply industry without this year's 6 per cent. increase in prices—let alone the 9 per cent. increase of last year.

I know—as do the steel workers of my area—why the 9 per cent. and 6 per cent. increases were applied. It was to ensure that, despite the existing burdens on domestic consumers—millions of whom find it difficult to pay their bills—and despite the enormous trade deficit we have as a result of the Government's incompetence and negligence, consumers must also bear the burden of increased costs of production.

The Government give no priority to industry, and I regret that organisations such as the CBI and others that are supposed to represent Britain's important industries tend to be supine in their criticism of Government policies which are not in the interests of British industry. Sooner or later, a Government will have to take office who recognise that the job of exporting and matching the enormous deficit now facing the United Kingdom requires a different set of priorities. Such a Government would not force industry and domestic consumers to bear enormous price increases only in order to provide the Government with a sweetener to enable them to privatise the industry.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): In Committee and on Report we have been constantly told that the Bill is in the interests of the consumer. That is a lot of rubbish. It is really in the interests of the people who will buy into the industry. It is all right for the Minister to tell us, both in Committee and on the Floor of the House, that ordinary people will be able to buy into the industry. In previous privatisations the Chancellor of the Exchequer had the nerve to stand at the Dispatch Box and say that pensioners would be in the queues to buy shares in the privatisation of our public industries. Some pensioners may have bought a share or two but it was not long before they flogged them to the big-money folk who moved in to buy them off. Organisations and people with big money are the ones who have bought up willy nilly the industries that the Government have privatised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) mentioned the regulator who will be acting not in the interests of the consumer but, once again, in the interests of those who will get a rake-off—those whom Conservative Members represent. Conservative Members represent the people with pockets of money—I am not joking. They have put so much money in their pockets that they cannot find enough pockets to hold it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield mentioned big G and little G, which reminded me that in my youth there were two first-class Warner Brothers film stars—Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson. They were always talking about getting hold of big G. They robbed banks and folks in the street for big Gs, which they used to call greenbacks. That is what the Bill is all about. I understand big G and little G and it hurts me because Opposition Members represent ordinary folk in the street. Conservative Members represent people in big business—by God, they look after them.

While the Minister is listening, I shall tell him something else. I am terribly disappointed that the Secretary of State is not here. He is swanning around in Concorde in the Soviet Union when he should be here delivering this wicked Bill for the privatisation of electricity. He has ducked out of his responsibility and nipped across to have a word with Gorbachev, perhaps to try to convince him to sell off his electricity industry. He will have a job over there, although it appears that he has a simple job here.

Mr. Hardy: I knew that the Secretary of State was away but I did not know that he was travelling in Concorde. If so, his journey time must be short enough to allow him to fulfil both his obligations—the one here and the one in Russia.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I fail to see how any of this can possibly arise under any of the amendments before the House.

Mr. Haynes: No. I shall duck out of that one.

I am making the point that the Secretary of State should be here, delivering the Bill through the House on the last day on Report, and Third Reading, instead of swanning around in the Soviet Union. Too many Secretaries of State swan around in different places of the world. Half of them live in the stratosphere instead of here, doing their jobs on behalf of the people they are supposed to represent.

I am getting a bellyful from my constituents who, as I told the Minister in Committee, had a bellyful of Sid, when the Government were flogging off gas. All we saw when we switched on our televisions was Sid. All of a sudden, Sid disappeared and the Secretary of State seems to keep disappearing on this Bill too. In Committee I also suggested that the Government ought to consider seriously their advertisements. My constituents tell me that they know all about our electricity industry, yet the Government keep putting advertisements on television telling us all about it. It is all in the interests of flogging off the industry to those people who have plenty of money but who want to make more. The Secretary of State keeps bumping up the price of electricity—by 9 per cent. last year and by seven point something this year, after we were told that the increase would be 6 per cent. The Minister is not looking at me—he is looking around the Chamber. I am trying to educate him about my constituents' feelings but I shall be happy to give way to him if he wants to intervene.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have certainly been listening to the hon. Gentleman, but it takes some concentration because he always makes the same speech. If he made a different one, it would be easier to listen with intense interest.

Mr. Blair: Ministers are so difficult to educate.

Mr. Haynes: I must keep repeating my message until I get it across; some of these Ministers are really thick. They do not listen.

The Opposition are talking sense. We hear a lot of technical rubbish from the Government, but when we get back to our constituencies we hear in no uncertain terms about what people there think about the Government's actions. At the moment, we are talking about the privatisation of electricity——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are talking about the amendments before the House.

Mr. Haynes: Come on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, be fair. I am talking about the costs and price of privatisation, and I am telling the Minister how my constituents feel. I am speaking of lower-paid workers, not Members of Parliament, particularly Conservative Members who hold seven or eight directorships as well as this job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) raised a point of order earlier about where the money was really going to go. It will not go to the people we represent—it will go to the people the Conservatives represent. The Conservatives always look after their kind, but, as the Minister knows full well, come the next election we shall occupy the Government Benches and the Minister will be here only if he wins his seat.

I am repeating myself for a specific purpose. We shall put the electricity industry right when we return to power, and it will be under public control so that the people out in the country can take the decisions—not a small clique of 300 or so Conservative Members deciding matters for 60 million people in the country. It is true that the Government gave fair warning in their manifesto that they intended to privatise this and other industries. My notes at this point read, "Consumers—ha! ha! ha!" This is a big joke; the Government are not interested in the consumer.

The Government Benches are empty today, but here comes the little lad from Bosworth who made a contribution in Committee last week. I hope that the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) will make one today. Occasionally he makes sensible contributions about

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this privatisation. He has probably been outside the Chamber preparing his speech, which I can see on his knees. I hope that he will tell us his real feelings about the people in his constituency. I know plenty of people there; Bosworth is not far from my constituency. At one time it was Labour-controlled——

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Not any more.

Mr. Haynes: It will go back to being so——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Bosworth is not mentioned in the amendments. I hope that we shall get back to them now.

5.15 pm

Mr. Haynes: Privatisation affects Bosworth as well as my constituency or Sedgefield or the Minister's constituency. It involves every constituency—even Doncaster, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not think that you will pull me up for mentioning Doncaster, which will be seriously affected by the privatisation of electricity. It has a race course, with occasional night racing, for which lights are needed. The race course will be affected by the prices which we will enjoy following privatisation. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you do not mind my saying so. Mr. Deputy Speaker is fair; he gives us the opportunity to speak our feelings, which is what I am trying to do this afternoon. I know that you have pulled me up a couple of times, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but you did not really mean it. The important thing is that many people at the lower end of the income scale are wholly dependent on social security benefits—yet the Government have cut them. Such people will really feel the massive price increases that are on the way.

I know how this will end up: more people will have their electricity cut off, and Members of Parliament will face real problems. When Labour returns to power after the next election, we shall put all that right. We shall reduce the number of cut-offs, introduce fairness and put the money where it is needed, not into the pockets of the rich.

I remember my hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) holding up his poll tax form from Scotland. The poll tax is another way in which the Government are robbing the poor whom we are trying to look after. My hon. Friend held up his poll tax demand and said that it was for £1,000 less than he had paid last year. That shows what the Government are up to. The lower paid and those just above the border line will pay——

Mr. Tredinnick: Will the hon. Gentleman inform the House next that since the privatisation of the gas industry there have been far fewer disconnections?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that he will not do so on this group of amendments.

Mr. Haynes: You are right, Mr. Deputy Speaker, gas is not mentioned in the amendment. The hon. Gentleman has got himself in a mess and should rephrase his question.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am sorry if I misled the hon. Gentleman. Since the privatisation of the gas industry the number of disconnections has fallen, so it is likely that the number of disconnections in the electricity industry will likewise fall because of the downward pressure on prices.

Mr. Haynes: The hon. Gentleman has not done his homework. I am suggesting that, because of previous privatisations, prices have risen and gas cut-offs have trebled. After this privatisation there will be more and more cut-offs of electricity——

Mr. Hardy: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in addition to the people who may be disconnected, a growing number of people are likely to need special concessions in the form of pre-payment meters, tokens and so on? These people will pay more for their electricity than those who can afford to pay the higher bills without much trouble.

Mr. Haynes: Exactly. The Secretary of State has talked about the pre-payment meter with a card. That is more costly to the consumer, but the Secretary of State did not mention that. People in the lower income groups will be hit hard.

I am being bombarded by representatives of industry who tell me of how their industries will be affected by the increased costs of electricity. Industry is telling us in no uncertain terms that it is not looking forward to privatisation. I see that the Minister is busy. I hope that he does not need to send his Parliamentary Private Secretary to find an answer to my questions. The problems that I am putting to the Minister are simple and he should fully understand them because the problems in his constituency must be similar to the problems in mine in connection with what will happen after privatisation. People are asking how they will pay their bills. They want to know whether they will be cut off or whether they will have a pre-payment meter put in and pay extra. Will industry in the Minister's constituency pay more and more which will then be reflected in prices? Bread, a necessity of life, will increase in price because of privatisation. That is why we keep pressing the Minister, as we did in Committee, about exactly what will happen under the Bill.

The Government do not listen and that is why Ministers repeat themselves at the Dispatch Box. They will not listen to home truths from Members who really represent the people. Our constituents tell us and we bring the information to the House. There are real problems now in the constituencies, quite apart from the problems that will exist after privatisation. The situation will get worse, but it is a waste of time asking the Minister to consider the issues that we are putting forward. The Minister will not be able to answer my next question because his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy is not in the Chamber. He is in Moscow, talking, I hope, to Gorbachev.

The Bill will hit our constituents and at this eleventh hour I ask them to withdraw the Bill and leave the industry under public control. That is where it will be when we are in government.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Amendment No. 191 asks distribution companies to

"include a financial statement surveying costs for each area board during that year.'."

That is a modest request. People are greatly concerned about what the Electricity Bill holds in terms of future prices. The same concern applies to the Water Bill because water prices are likely to rise by 50 per cent. or more in the

next few years. The Bill will create a private monopoly because there will be no real competition and no alternative source of supply for the consumer. Each area board will have to make a profit for its shareholders and at the end of the day such profit can come only from the bills that are sent to consumers.

Last year there was a 9 per cent. increase in price and this year there will be a further 6 per cent. rise. There is no justification for either of those rises and it is quite clear that they were imposed simply to fatten the industry for privatisation. About 80 per cent. of our industry relies on coal and the productivity record of our coal industry has been stupendous. There has been a more than 50 per cent. improvement in productivity in the last five years, so there is no justification for the price rises.

At the first sitting of the Standing Committee in January we discussed prices, franchises and the future investment policy of the Central Electricity Generating Board. The justification given for last year's price rise was that the electricity industry needed to embark on a massive investment programme of £45 billion. At that first sitting the arguments advanced by the Secretary of State on that £45 billion figure were torn to shreds. There is no way that the industry requires investment on that scale. It obviously needs new power stations, not PWRs, but proper environment-respecting coal-powered stations. Thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), the figure of £45 billion was knocked into shape. The Government were talking about outturn prices in the year 2000. The correct figure turned out to be £13 billion at present prices. In Committee we destroyed the case for last year's 9 per cent. increase and this year's 6 per cent. increase.

As I have said, the ordinary consumer is greatly concerned about the future price of electricity. That concern is shared by industry. In my part of the world, in south Wales, industry has the highest proportion of electricity demand of any region. Fifty-nine per cent. of electricity produced in south Wales goes to industry. The Merseyside and North-Western electricity board area has the second highest with 56 per cent. Industry faced a price rise of 9 per cent. last year and 6 per cent. this year, but who knows what sort of increase it will face in the years ahead? Such increases affect the competitiveness of British industry.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): My hon. Friend is on an important issue and in some ways the matter has gone full circle. The only source of energy for operating industrial machinery is electricity. Machines cannot run on gas or oil or on any other energy source. An increase in electricity prices to the coal industry, which consumes a huge amount of electricity, will push up coal prices and create pressure on the coal industry.

Mr. Williams: My hon. Friend is right. Increases in the price of electricity feed right through industry and result in increases in the price of raw materials such as coal and the price of the manufactured goods that we need to sell on world markets. It crucially affects competitiveness.

Faced with increased charges, many major industries, the large consumers, may decide to opt out of supply from the distribution companies and provide their own independent supply. That will have a knock-on effect on the domestic consumer because prices to the householder will go even higher. We should remember that electricity costs bear heavily on elderly people, families and the low paid. That compounds the retail prices index. Electricity costs are a small part of a rich person's budget, but for the low paid and the elderly—people who spend most of their time at home—the electricity bill forms a large chunk of their outgoings.

The Bill talks about some kind of mythical downward pressure on prices that might come from increased efficiency. However, shareholders will demand their cut. Where can that money come from other than from higher prices? I recently had a look at the 1987-88 annual report of the CEGB, which has a 50-year history. In the last 30 years electricity prices have fallen in real terms and have dropped below the retail price index.

Part of the reason for that is increased efficiency in the running of power stations and the generating of electricity. Another part of the reason is that, generally, fuel costs have fallen in real terms.

5.30 pm

I cannot see why the Bill should not contain a clause saying that, over the next 10 years, electricity prices need not rise in real terms so that that pattern is continued. British Coal has offered the CEGB a 10-year price agreement under which the price of coal would be fixed to the retail prices index. In the past five or six years, coal prices have fallen, and that could be continued for the next 10 years. Fuel costs represent the major cost in generating electricity, and 80 per cent. of our electricity comes from the burning of coal, so there is no reason why electricity prices should increase in real terms over the next 10 years.

As a result of the amendment,

"a financial statement surveying the cost of each board"

would be submitted every year. That is a simple safeguard for consumers. I am certain that the Bill will inevitably lead to higher electricity prices, but there must be transparency about what is happening.

Mr. George J. Buckley (Hemsworth): I agree with my hon. Friend that increased electricity prices are the inevitable result of privatisation. However, will not the main pressure to increase prices, as has been stated by the Minister in Committee, be a result of the higher return on capital investment that is bound to be demanded from a privatised electricity industry?

Mr. Williams: My hon. Friend is right. The Government are increasing the rate of return. In an electricity industry in the hands of private shareholders, there are dangers that that will be pushed further. Another pressure on the cost of electricity is the nuclear component that the Government insist on having—the nuclear quota or nuclear tax. The four PWR stations will cost at least £1 billion each, and the electricity that they produce will be uneconomic especially at the high discount rates that the Government are talking about.

The Bill is a cause of great worry for the domestic consumer. People are concerned that, as with water prices, electricity prices will go through the roof over the next few years. That is why the Government should be listening to public opinion. Some 70 per cent. of the people are opposed to the Bill.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I commend amendment No. 191. A financial statement for each area board would allow some visible mechanism whereby a proportion of the profits that the area boards will undoubtedly rake off from the business of selling electricity can be diverted into vital

[Dr. Kim Howells]

research and development by our universities, our centres of research and our centres of excellence. That might put them on a par with the research and development carried out by the large multinational corporations. They will be selling us technologies that at the moment may not be profitable, but in the future will be both vital and profitable. For example, renewable energies and clean burn technologies are being developed and investigated at Grimethorpe. Research is being carried out into the decommissioning processes, about which we know so little but which those on the Government Front Bench blandly assume will be carried out with impunity. There is also research into the storage of nuclear waste. The Government have already admitted that there is a good case for a nuclear tax, which is what it will amount to—let us not try to gloss over it. In other words, there will be a rake off of profits to sustain a ringfence nuclear industry.

Instead of that, why should not a proportion of the profits that will undoubtedly accrue in large amounts go into research and development? That would ensure that in the 21st century we shall not be held hostage by the technologies that will otherwise be designed and developed by the multinational corporations in Japan, the United States and Germany. Why can we not develop them here, so that British industry will be in the forefront of these industries? This amendment would give us some purchase on this otherwise hostile Bill, and mean that the state can insist that the electricity industry pays attention to research and development because, if it does not, the electricity supply industry will fall badly behind.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): My hon. Friends have made out a clear case as to why amendment No. 191 should be accepted. The principal reason is that, as the consequence of the Bill, the price of electricity will increase considerably. Last year, there was an increase of 9 per cent., and this year an increase of 6 per cent. in England and Wales and 8·5 per cent. in Scotland, all as a direct consequence of the Bill. Additional costs will result from the nuclear levy, and costs of flotation and various other associated costs, and the need for the new privatised companies to increase profits for their shareholders.

We must ask what the Government have to be afraid of that makes them oppose our amendment No. 191. We are simply asking that, in his annual report, the director includes a financial statement so that the consumer can see what the costs are in the various area boards. The Government have claimd that the Bill will introduce competition, but they are refusing us the opportunity to see how that competition will operate in practice and how the costs of the boards match up to one another. That is a simple service to provide the consumer, and the best person to provide it is the director. That is why we have tabled our amendment.

The Government amendments relate mainly to the powers of the director in relation to the companies, and in particular the sanctions that the director will have to ensure compliance with the Act and the various licence conditions. Amendment No. 22 will strengthen the hand of the director. Under the Bill as previously drafted, the director would have had to show that there had been a previous contravention by the licence holder. We argued against that in Committee and were pleased that the Government agreed that the director could anticipate a contravention on the part of a licence holder. However, amendment No. 25 lets the licence holder off the hook to a certain extent because it gives the director the power to negotiate. I am concerned about that, and I ask the Minister to explain how he sees that operating.

I am particularly concerned about clause 46, which requires the director to produce an annual report. Specifically, clause 46(2)(b) requires him to set out in his annual report

"any final or provisional orders made by the Director during that year".

That will exclude boards or licence holders who have transgressed, but who are able to get into a negotiating position because of amendment No. 25, and avoid any publicity that might result from their transgression and the adverse effect on their business that that might involve.

I am also concerned about what would be involved in the failure of any board or licence holder to recognise the order of the director. Apart from the issue of a provisional order or a final order, there is no real sanction on the continually transgressing boards.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In speaking to amendment No. 191, the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) designated today as consumer day. I must tell the House that, after the passage of the Bill, every day will be consumer day. I shall tell the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), all others who contributed to the debate and anyone else who cares to listen why that is so. The generating side of the business, which the hon. Member for Sedgefield designated as twice removed, accounts for about 70 per cent. of all the costs that pass through to the consumer. Therefore, it is of some direct interest to the consumer. That side of the business will be subject to stringent competition.

We know of 20 projects with cost structures that are considerably below those that are now the average for the CEGB. I can inform the House of some of them because they are in the public domain. These include Barking, Corby, Roosecote, Leicester and Brigg. I cannot refer to them all because some of them are commercially confidential. However, the cost structures that we have seen are considerably below those of the CEGB.

The Government's case does not rest on the existence or otherwise of 20 new independent projects that will represent anything up to 7·5 GW of potential electricity. Our case rests on fundamentally altering the structure of the generating side of the electricity industry We are changing an industry in which there is only one supplier of electricity in England and Wales. It is that supplier which determines the cost structure of the industry and then passes the consequences of that straight through to the consumer. The fact that we are interposing a new set of pressures on the generating side of the industry constitutes our basic argument that we are doing more for the consumer in one piece of legislation than the Labour party will ever contemplate doing, even in its wildest dreams.

5.45 pm

I call in evidence the pronouncements, for example, of the chief executive designate of National Power, Mr. Baker, whom the Opposition are especially keen to quote. There are also the pronouncements of Mr. Malpas, the chairman designate of PowerGen. The Opposition do not seem to understand that those gentlemen's pronouncements signal a radical change in attitude on the part of undertakings which, for the first time, are having to think

about the market place. Mr. Baker's speech, which was of particular interest to the Opposition in its leaked form, made the position clear for future employees. He was categoric when he said, in effect, "Unless we start to realise that we are in competition from now onwards with other companies, your jobs and our business will be at stake." That is precisely the change in attitude that I call in aid in justifying the argument that the Bill is in the interests of consumers.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Are the private generators to which the Minister has been talking willing to proceed on anything other than a take-and-pay basis?

Mr. Spicer: I can tell the hon. Gentleman what I told him only the other day. The motivation of the companies does not reside in any price structure that is either imposed on them or given to them, or in conditions of the sort to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Instead, it resides in their knowledge of the efficiency with which they will be able potentially to compete with existing players. They know that they have new technologies, ideas, management structures and practices that will enable them to compete with the successor bodies.

Mr. Blair: Perhaps the Minister will care to confirm something that he was not prepared to commit himself to in Committee. Under the contracts concluded by area boards and the duopoly structure—PowerGen and National Power—that the Government are setting up, there will be no yardstick competition prevailing.

Mr. Spicer: The question of contracts is one that is yet to be settled. I have never made any bones about that. There is no secret about it. Nor is there any secret about the fact that the Government intend that the contracts should not be agreed to in a way that will prevent future and further competition.

As for competition——

Mr. Blair: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Spicer: I shall let the hon. Gentleman intervene later. I wish to develop an important argument.

The hon. Gentleman based his speech on the argument that we are doing nothing for the consumer. I have said already that that is manifestly untrue in respect of generation. Even if the considerations and worries that the hon. Gentleman has presented were realities, the fact remains that the generation side of the industry is to be changed radically. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away from the fact that there is one monopoly supplier. That supplier is to have his monopoly broken, and from now on the industry will be geared up to encourage new entrants.

Incidentally, the amendment refers to area boards. I thought that we would be able to agree that the Bill refers to public electricity suppliers. Area boards will be abolished by the Bill. However, I put that on one side. Opposition Members have argued that competitive pressures will bear too strongly on the public electricity supply companies. For example, large companies or smaller companies will have a right not to contract with their local public electricity supply company. The supply companies will face pressures that have never existed in the past. As they will have the right to charge the tariff structures that they wish to introduce under the regulatory conditions, undoubtedly there will be a measure of competitive pressure that does not presently exist.

Where competitive pressures do not exist, there will be the regulator and the regulatory rules. For the first time, the regulator will have the consumer as one of his prime responsibilities when he comes to focus upon his duties. The regulatory duties that relate to the consumer are spelt out in a way that is different from anything which has existed in the past. That is denied by the hon. Member for Sedgefield, but it is a fact that duties will be placed upon the regulator to regard as paramount the interests of consumers.

Under the Bill, there is a right to the supply of electricity that did not exist previously for anyone with connections, or potential connections, more than 50 yd away from the mains supply. That is another consumer right that has been introduced. There is to be a panoply of new consumer rights under the Bill. At least give us the credit for that. If the companies do not meet certain standards, moneys will be returned to consumers. That is a brand new provision. That is something which the hon. Member for Sedgefield might acknowledge in a debate that is about consumers.

Mr. Blair: The Bill does not do a single thing for consumers that could not be done separately from privatisation. The hon. Gentleman must make a case showing why the Government are privatising the industry. So that the public fully understand, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the ordinary, average consumer will have no choice but to continue contracting with his area board?

Mr. Spicer: The case that the hon. Gentleman must make is in answer to the hon. Member for Ashfield, who said that he wanted to put the industry back into public control. I shall not leave that point alone and I shall certainly address the question "Why privatise?" put by the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

I have already said that customers, including, for instance, those managing large new estates or large blocks of flats, would have the right to opt out—as everyone has —and it might even be a practical proposition— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Sedgefield is not listening to my answer to his question. Domestic customers will have the right to opt out, and certain managers of large new estates or large blocks of flats may well want to do so——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Spicer: I have answered one question put by the hon. Member for Sedgefield and I want to deal with his other questions.

One feature for which no Opposition Member has given credit in the context of a debate on consumer rights, although I am sure that they have understood it, is the new place of the consumers' committees within the regulatory body. For the first time, instead of shouting outside the industry and giving the benefit of their advice to anyone who wishes to listen, consumers' committees will be players involved in the regulatory process. They will have statutory rights that they did not have before. At least the Opposition might congratulate the Government on this new innovative approach to the involvement of consumers' committees within the regulatory authority.

Mr. Lofthouse: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that domestic dwellings can opt out?

Mr. Spicer: I am saying that everyone will have the right to opt out. The question on which, I suspect, the Labour Front Bench will wish to come back to me is whether that is a practical proposition. I have told the House that in certain circumstances the managers of large new estates or large blocks of flats may decide that, at the very least, they want to ensure that their local public electricity supply company understands that they have that right. The pressure that those managers could exert might be satisfactory from the consumers' point of view——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that we can return more closely to the amendments before the House.

Mr. Spicer: I hesitate to quarrel in any way with your ruling, Sir, but you allowed the hon. Member for Sedgefield to develop an argument against our proposals in relation to consumers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is right. I was a little overrelaxed in allowing a wide debate. The Minister is being given an adequte opportunity to respond to those points which I should not perhaps have allowed. I hope that, now that the matter has been redressed, we shall return to the amendments.

Mr. Spicer: You allowed the Opposition to ask why we were going to privatise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that they felt that that question was related to the question of surveying costs for, as they described it, each area board, although it will not be an area board. This matter is relevant and, if I may, I should like to answer the question "Why privatise?" It is a fair question in the context of consumerism and prices.

One reason why we wish to privatise is that the country is faced—this relates directly to the question of surveying costs—with a massive investment programme. We have argued about exactly what it will comprise. The central part of our position is that that investment will not take place on the taxpayers' back, as it would in the public sector.

More fundamentally, it will occur in a form that is not dependent upon political decisions taken behind beige doors in Whitehall but has reference to genuine market needs. That must be a better way of engaging in investment decisions than having decisions that are a result of political infighting, as so many investment decisions are at present.

Because of your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me leave aside the issue of increasing further public ownership of shares. By "public ownership of shares" we mean increasing ownership from the present 9 million shareholders and particularly increasing ownership of shares by employees—something about which the Opposition have never liked hearing.

I should like to ask the Opposition a question which we have asked before but to which we have not had an answer. Do they or do they not agree with the Labour Whip, the hon. Member for Ashfield, who jumps from the Front Bench to the Back Benches and makes a statement on the Opposition's behalf that he would renationalise——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are being led back into a Second Reading debate, but we will not have that. Hon. Members must return to the amendments before the House. I hope that when hon. Members demand flexibility from the Chair they realise the consequences of opening that door.

Mr. Spicer: Of course I bow to your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall ask that question later. I serve notice on the Opposition that, when it is in order, I should like them to say whether public control means renationalisation under a different name.

We have not heard much about the Government's amendments, I suspect, because the Opposition basically agree—*[Interruption.]* I have been answering the points raised by the hon. Member for Sedgefield, and I think that it is fair for the Government to do that. Hon. Members should not provoke me if they do not want answers.

The Government amendments were suggested after discussion in Committee, as were a number of Government amendments that have been tabled in the past few days, as the Opposition recognise. These amendments relate to the power of the director general to deal with matters when it is likely in his view that a public electricity supplier or licence holder will take actions that may break the licence conditions. The hon. Member for Sedgefield asked whether an enforcement procedure would be provided for in subsequent Government amendments. There is such a procedure. It concerns various levels and is allowed for in the Bill, as a reading of the Bill makes clear. There is no question of enforcement being a problem. I can give that assurance.

These Government amendments have been brought forward in a desire to meet the points made by hon. Members in Committee.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 23, in page 18, line 9, leave out 'has contravened and is likely again' and insert 'is likely'.

No. 24, in page 18, line 30, leave out 'has contravened and is likely again' and insert 'is likely'.

No. 25, in page 18, line 38, after 'order', insert—

'(aa) that the licence holder has agreed to take and is taking all such steps as it appears to the Director for the time being to be appropriate for the licence holder to take for the purpose of securing or facilitating compliance with the condition or requirement in question;'.

No. 26, in page 19, line 18, leave out 'the preceding provisions of this part' and insert 'section 8 or sections 15 to 19, *(Additional terms of supply)* 20 and 21 above'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 25

VALIDITY AND EFFECT OF ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 27, in page 21, line 20, leave out 'the supplier' and insert 'him'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 27

REGULATIONS RELATING TO SUPPLY AND SAFETY

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 22, line 25, leave out from 'efficient' to end of line 30 and insert—

'(b) protecting the public from dangers arising from the generation, transmission or supply of electricity, from the use of electricity supplied or from the installation, maintenance or use of any electric line or electrical plant; and

(c) without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (b) above, eliminating or reducing the risks of personal injury, or damage to property or interference with its use, arising as mentioned in that paragraph.'. —*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 7

USE ETC. OF ELECTRICITY METERS

Amendments made: No. 29, in page 96, line 22, after 'whom' insert

'and the circumstances in which'.

No. 30, in page 98, line 9, leave out from 'supplier' to end of line 10 and insert

'otherwise than in respect of the supply of electricity, the provision of an electric line or electrical plant or the provision of the meter'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 30

ELECTRICITY FROM NON-FOSSIL FUEL SOURCES

Amendments made: No. 31, in page 24, line 16, leave out from 'made' to end of line 18 and insert—

'(a) such arrangements; or

(b) where a previous order under this subsection has had effect in relation to him, such additional arrangements,

as will secure the result mentioned in subsection (1A) below.

(1A) The result referred to in subsection (1) above is that—

(a) on and after the second day appointed by the order; or'.

No. 32, in page 24, line 22, leave out first 'him' and insert 'the public electricity supplier.'

No. 33, in page 24, line 23, leave out 'this section' and insert 'subsection (1) above'.

No. 34, in page 24, line 29, leave out 'that subsection' and insert 'subsection (1A) above'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 31

FOSSIL FUEL LEVY

6 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: I beg to move amendment No. 35, in page 25, line 32, leave out 'makes an order' and insert 'has made one or more orders'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 36 to 43.

Mr. Spicer: After the previous debate, I shall be brief, although the Opposition may want me to come back to some points. I shall explain the purpose of the amendments. If the contract between the generator and the supply company contains terms that allow for payments to be made before stations are commissioned, the amendments will allow the costs to be covered through the levy.

The issue is complicated, so the best way to proceed is for me to listen to any Opposition comments and respond to them if necessary.

Mr. Doran: I was interested to hear the Minister's point. My interpretation is that the amendment extends considerably the scope of the nuclear levy and introduces the concept of advance payments. There is no reference to contracts between suppliers and generators, so it seems that the amendment seeks to introduce the concept of payment in advance of the intended nuclear generating capacity. We have heard of four new generators and we have already referred today to the cost of that scheme, which the Minister put at £38 billion. That is interesting in the context of the debates in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) often pressed the Secretary of State and the Minister to make clear what was covered by the nuclear levy and it was made clear at that time that it did not cover advance payments.

One possible interpretation of the amendment is that the whole cost of any new generating capacity can be included in those advance payments. In Committee, the Minister conceded that the level of the levy was likely to be in excess of 8 per cent., and gave a figure approaching 10 per cent. when pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield. That is a crucial and fundamental question on a day that is devoted to consumers and prices. The Minister should advise us what extra cost has been added to consumer costs as a result of the amendment, which allows the payment of advance expenses. The Minister conceded a figure of 8 per cent. If we take into account the additional expenditure of about £30 billion between now and the turn of the century, we must be talking about a considerably increased cost. We are entitled to an answer at this stage of the debate.

It is also important to note—although we are talking about a different degree of cost—that amendment No. 40 allows the Government to farm out the whole process. In Committee, the Minister talked about the possible use of a firm of accountants. That is another area where the bureaucratic structure of regulation and the collection of the levy will involve more cost for the consumer. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister what costs he envisages will be involved. The structure required to assess the level of levy and to collect it will be considerable. Amendment No. 36 appears to add substantially to the costs brought within the scope of the levy. We demand to know what that will mean for the consumer.

Mr. Hardy: I had not intended to speak on these amendments, and I want merely to make one point. In his rather long reply to the previous debate, the Minister did not say a word to explain the grossly unsatisfactory situation that faces industries that are high energy users, such as the one in my own constituency to which I referred. The Minister will be aware that, while the Bill was in Committee, the chemical industry expressed deep anxiety about its position. British industry, especially that part of it that uses a great deal of energy, will have found no cause for comfort in anything the Minister has said. He did not appear to address the problem at all.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I must remind the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) of a point that needs to be made every so often, which is that, in real terms, electricity prices have been falling over the past five years. Industrial electricity prices have fallen by 6 per cent. It also has to be said—and I did not want to raise the point again—that in the five years of the last Labour Government, domestic prices rose by 9 per cent. and industrial prices by 6 per cent. in real terms. The hon. Gentleman asked a question on behalf of the chemical industry or possibly the steel industry—I do not know which. Under the last Labour Government, prices rose in real terms, whereas under this Government prices have fallen in real terms. What substantial case is the hon. Gentleman making?

Mr. Hardy: The Minister overlooks the central point. The Government should be looking at our industrial costs in comparison with those of our competitors. It is no good the Minister saying that electricity prices have fallen in real terms. I would not say whether they have or not. What we must do is to compare the costs faced by British industry with the costs faced by our competitors. As I said in an earlier debate, the competitive edge of British industrial high energy users is considerably blunted as a consequence of the decisions taken last year and this year. It seems that we are justified in being fearful about the effect next year or the year after.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I am grateful for that further intervention, because it gives me the chance to put the record straight. I gave one figure wrongly by 100 per cent. Industrial prices have fallen not by 6 per cent., but by 12 per cent. under this Conservative Government. That is one of those slips of the tongue on which the Opposition would be happy to sit. Industrial prices have fallen by 12 per cent. under this Conservative Government, whereas they rose by 6 per cent. in real terms under the last Labour Government.

The hon. Gentleman made a fair point about competitiveness, so I must point out that if one compares our industrial electricity prices with those of, for example, other European countries, we come in about the middle. If we consider the West Germans, we do much better than——

Mr. Morgan: Not for bulk supply.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman refers to bulk supply and industry sometimes makes the case that there is a panoply of special contracts in Europe about which nobody knows much. I have asked the industry from time to time to come up with information that can be publicised about this mass of subterranean contracts which would give a different picture from the one that I have given to the House, but it is difficult to obtain specific, detailed evidence. However, we have published data about electricity prices for industry generally. That shows that British industry as a whole receives electricity at about the median price level compared with other European countries. Nobody denies that.

Mr. Morgan: What about contract prices?

Mr. Spicer: The Government have to go on published data. Private contracts may exist, but such private information is not available to the Government.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) asked what was to be included in the levy, and whether the amendment would mean an increase in the levy. I shall make broadly the same point as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made in reply to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in Committee. At the moment, the cost of financing nuclear power stations is taken directly, within the price. Whether that will be the case in future, and whether the levy will directly finance nuclear power stations—as it would under the present arrangements—depends on what contracts are struck. In particular it depends on the financing arrangements catered for and the timing of payments under those contracts. Until the contracts have been settled, therefore, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the answer that he seeks.

What I can say is that the Government will ensure that the contracts strike the right balance between providing a motivation for the industry to invest in nuclear power stations and ensuring that they do not make excess profit from, and are not wasteful in, that investment to the detriment of the consumer. I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Mr. Doran: The Minister seems to have confirmed what he refused to confirm in Committee. I want to be clear on exactly what he is saying. The amendment says nothing about contracts. It gives a specific right to the new supply industry to receive payments in certain specific circumstances. The amendment seems to cover the whole cost of providing the capacity and appears to have nothing to do with contracts or the Government's control of those contracts.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct, because the amendments are permissive and allow for the recouping of costs. I am not saying that the costs will be financed as he suggests, because that will depend on how the contracts are struck. At the moment, the industry finances its development directly and passes its costs straight on to the bulk supply tariff. In future, there will, no doubt, be an element of financing, but we cannot tell what the exact result will be until the contracts have been struck. I hope that, on the basis of that explanation, the Opposition will feel able to accept the amendments.

Mr. Morgan: That was a completely unsatisfactory reply. An issue of *Electrical Review* that came out over Christmas carried the headline "Proposed Contracts are Riskless". The description that the Minister has given is a perfect description of a contract that is riskless for the private sector. The electricity consumer will now have to pay the private generator to build private generating stations. If that is the purpose of the Bill, it is about time the consumer knew it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) and I spent a long time examining Government amendments Nos. 36 to 43, and concluded that they showed that the nuclear levy is in serious trouble. The Government and the electricity companies do not know, and the consumer and the House certainly do not know, how the nuclear levy will work. It has been devised at a Sir Humphrey's mad hatter's tea party and the amendments show us all just how much trouble the levy is in and just how short a time the Government have left to get it right.

The area boards do not know how the nuclear levy will be collected. They know only that the additional costs of nuclear production over coal production—which John Baker, the chief executive, told us would be 42 per cent. in the financial year that has just started—will be distributed in some way. The proposal cuts completely across the concept at the heart of the Bill and the idea of direct contracts between generators and suppliers. It looks to us as though the Government are beginning to admit that they have devised a wholly unworkable system for collecting the levy.

Amendment agreed to.

6.15 pm

Amendment proposed: No. 36, in page 25, line 42, after 'the', insert

'aggregate of the amounts given by subsections (2A) and (2B) below.

(2A) The amount given by this subsection is a one-twelfth part of any advance payments which, in pursuance of qualifying arrangements, fall to be made by the public

electricity supplier during the relevant year; and in this subsection "the relevant year" means whichever one of the following periods the qualifying month falls within, namely—

(a) the period of twelve months beginning on the first day appointed by the first order under section 30 above; and

(b) each successive period of twelve months.

(2B) The amount given by this subsection is the'.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 262, Noes 180.

Division No. 148] **[6.16 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*

Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkhope, Timothy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 37, in page 25, line 44, leave out from 'cost' to 'during' in line 45 and insert

'to the supplier of purchasing or generating any electricity supplied by him'.

No. 38, in page 26, line 1, after 'cost,' insert 'to him'.

No. 39, in page 26, line 4, leave out 'the regulations' and insert

'regulations under this section and excluding, in the case of the cost mentioned in paragraph (a) above, any advance payments taken into account under subsection (2A) above'.

No. 40, in page 26, line 14, after 'sufficient', insert

'(after payment of the administrative expenses of the prescribed person)'.

No. 41, in page 26, line 17, at end insert—

'"advance payment" means—

(a) any payment made by the public electricity supplier in pursuance of the qualifying arrangements; and

(b) where he is generating electricity in pursuance of those arrangements, any expense so incurred by him,

which is made or incurred before any electricity is generated in pursuance of those arrangements, and any reference to the making of advance payments shall be construed accordingly;'.

No. 42, in page 26, line 21, leave out

'the order under section 30(1)'

and insert

'an order under section 30'.

No. 43, in page 26, line 25, leave out from 'the' to end of line 26 and insert

'first day appointed by the first order under section 30 above or, if that'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 32

FUEL STOCKS ETC. AT GENERATING STATIONS

6.30 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: I beg to move amendment No. 44, in page 27, line 26, at end insert—

'(4A) A direction under subsection (2) or (3) above which confers on any person the function of specifying anything failing to be specified under the direction may require that person to exercise that function in such manner as may be specified by the direction.'

This is essentially a technical amendment, designed to provide an additional and necessary element of flexibility to the direction-making powers in the clause. It allows the Secretary of State, when giving directions to the operators of generating stations, to give directions to the National Grid Company also. Clearly, that makes sense. It seemed to us right to underline that in the Bill.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 33

CONSENT REQUIRED FOR CONSTRUCTION ETC. OF GENERATING STATIONS

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move amendment No. 45, in page 28, line 1, leave out 'subsection (2)' and insert 'subsections (2) and (2A)'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 48, 46, 97, 99 and 100.

Mr. Lang: We have put down these amendments to clause 33, which provides for consent to be obtained for the construction, extension or operation of generating stations. The proposed amendments will provide a degree of flexibility if, for example, we wish to exclude certain types of station from the consent required should the 50 MW threshold be lowered at any time in the future. The amendments will also enable certain types of works in connection with generating stations, or certain changes in operation, to be exempted from the consent requirement if the Secretary of State considers it more appropriate that they should be dealt with under normal planning procedures.

Amendment No. 46 refers to fees accompanying applications. We have decided that, in future, fees should be payable with such applications. No such power exists under present legislation, and I think that the House would agree that it has long been anomalous that the Department's costs have not been recoverable.

Amendments Nos. 97 and 99 relate to the deeming of the granting of hazardous substances consent. New paragraph (1A) parallels a provision to be inserted into the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 and the Town and Country (Scotland) Act 1972 by part IV of the Housing and Planning Act 1986, which the Government intend to bring in force later this year.

Part IV of the 1986 Act will introduce new controls over hazardous substances. Under the provisions to be introduced by the Act in relation to statutory undertakers, a Minister will be able to deem to be granted hazardous substances consent where a hazardous substance will be present on a development for which his authorisation is required. This does not imply any diminution of scrutiny of any hazardous substance aspect of any application.

The purpose of the amendment is to simplify the procedures for those making applications under clause 33. Not all such applicants will be deemed to be statutory undertakers, and the relevant provision under part IV of the 1986 Act will not, therefore, be applicable in all cases. It is because of this that a free-standing provision in relation to deemed planning permission is already included in paragraph 7(1) of schedule 8. A similar free-standing provision is necessary to enable the Secretary of State to deem hazardous substances consent to be granted, where appropriate, in granting consent under clause 33.

The new paragraph requires the Secretary of State to consult the Health and Safety Commission before deeming a hazardous substances consent to be granted. This requirement is consistent with the parallel provision to be introduced under the Housing and Planning Act 1986.

Amendment No. 100 is a consolidation amendment, which also corrects an error in the original drafting.

Mr. Doran: I wish to raise some minor points of clarification.

As I understand it, amendment No. 48 will give the Secretary of State the power to order that certain power stations of the classes or descriptions that he will specify should not require his special consent. Under the terms of clause 33(2), power stations of under 50 MW generating capacity are already excluded, so I should like clarification of why that power is required. Does the Minister envisage that larger power stations—and if my memory serves me correctly, the 50 MW capacity can already be altered by order—would be excluded if they fell into a particular category?

In relation to amendment No. 97, the Opposition always get nervous when we feel that the Health and Safety Commission is being excluded or is not being given its proper place. Obviously I am conscious that the amendment would require it to be consulted, but in what circumstances would that be, and what change in the existing procedure is envisaged? My understanding is that at present the specific permission of the Health and Safety Commission—not just consultation—is required for the granting of a hazardous substance consent.

May I please have clarification on those two points?

Mr. Eadie: The Minister talked about fees having to be paid. He said that the House would probably be astonished to find that the Department's fees had never been recoverable. I wonder if he could tell us something about the circumstances, and about the sums that are likely to be involved.

Mr. Lang: I shall try to answer the three points that have been put to me.

As I explained in the context of amendment No. 48, we were anxious to have a degree of flexibility—for example, in case we might want to exclude certain types of stations from the consent requirement if we were to reduce the 50 MW threshold at any time in the future. It is also worth mentioning that the amendments would enable generating stations on offshore oil and gas installations which operate for the generators' own use to be exempted from the consent requirement. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran), particularly with his constituency interest, will know that there are special provisions under the Offshore Installations Act which cover offshore platforms, but that is an example of the kind of thing that we might wish to exclude from the provisions here.

The hon. Member is concerned about the implications for the Health and Safety Commission. Let me reassure him that under part IV of the 1986 Act we are tightening up the controls over substances of this kind, such as chlorine, hydrogen and asbestos. The amendments bring the Bill into line with the thinking behind that Act. As I have mentioned, the Secretary of State would be required to consult the Health and Safety Commission before deeming a hazardous substances consent to be granted.

In respect of the point raised by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie), it is difficult to be precise about the fees. They would tend to relate to the land involved in the application and would, therefore, form a very small proportion of the overall costs of any project in the context of the construction of a generating station. However, I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that it is in line with our general policy that such costs should be recovered. The provision would bring the situation into line with the arrangements for other planning applications.

Mr. Eadie: I know that the hon. Gentleman has made a statement about fees and costs, but would he care to write to me, when he has had an opportunity to consider the matter, and tell me what the cost is likely to be? Ministers are bound to have some idea.

Mr. Lang: How long is a piece of string? Certainly I will write to the hon. Gentleman—I am keen to be helpful. I am not sure that there is much more that I will be able to say to him, but I shall try to give some hypothetical cases, which I hope will assist.

[Mr. Lang]

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 28, line 13, at end insert—

'(2A) The Secretary of State may by order direct that subsection (1) above shall not apply to generating stations of a particular class or description, either generally or for such purposes as may be specified in the order.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 8

CONSENTS UNDER SECTIONS 33 AND 34

Amendments made: No. 46 in page 98, line 37, at end insert—

'(3) Regulations under this paragraph may make provision for determining the fees to be paid on applications for consent under section 33 or 34 of this Act, and the circumstances in which they are to be paid.

(4) Any sums received by the Secretary of State under this paragraph shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.'.

No. 97, in page 101, line 40, at end insert—

'(1A) On granting a consent under section 33 of this Act in respect of any operation or change of use that would involve the presence of a hazardous substance in circumstances requiring hazardous substances consent, the Secretary of State may, after consultation with the Health and Safety Commission, direct that hazardous substances consent shall be deemed to be granted, subject to such conditions (if any) as may be specified in the direction.'.

No. 99, in page 101, line 42, after 'permission', insert 'or hazardous substances consent'.

No. 100, in page 102, line 7, at end insert—

'(2) In section 149 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, each of the following, namely—

(a) subsection (3)(a) (power of Secretary of State to confer on urban development corporation functions of local planning authority in England and Wales); and

(b) subsection (8)(a) (which makes corresponding provision in relation to Scotland),

shall have effect in relation to the provisions of this Schedule (so far as applying to applications for consent under section 34 of this Act) as it has effect in relation to the provisions referred to in that subsection.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 9

PRESERVATION OF AMENITY AND FISHERIES

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I beg to move amendment No. 118, in page 102, line 10, leave out paragraphs 1 and 2 and insert—

'Code of Practice for Environmental Conservation: England and Wales

1.—(1) The Secretary of State in consultation with the Director General shall by order made by statutory instrument issue a code of practice with respect to the environmental and recreational duties for the purpose of:

(a) requiring, when formulating or considering any relevant proposals, each of the following, namely, any licence holder, any person authorised by an exemption to generate electricity, the Director and the Secretary of State,

(i) to further the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside (including its flora and fauna and geological and physiographical features) and of any features of archaeological interest there;

(ii) to further the protection of buildings, features and other objects of architectural or historic interest; and

(iii) to promote energy conservation.

(b) giving advice to any licence holder, and any person authorised by exemption to generate electricity, with respect to any of the requirements in subsection 1(a) above.

(c) promoting practices that will further the requirements under subsection 1(a) above;

(2) In fulfilling their responsibilities those named in subsection 1 above shall:

(a) take into account any effect the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, buildings or objects, as described in subsection 1(a) above.

(3) In subsection (1) 'relevant proposals' means:

(a) in relation to any licence holder or any person authorised by an exemption to generate electricity, any proposals, programme or series of proposals:

(i) for the construction, extension or operation of a generating station;

(ii) for the installation of an electric line, whether above or below ground;

(iii) for the execution of any other works for or connection with the generation, transmission or supply of electricity;

(b) in relation to the Director any proposals, programme or series of proposals which arise as a result of his general duties to promote the generation, and efficient use, of electricity;

(c) in relation to the Secretary of State, any proposals for which his consent is required under this Act.

(4) In fulfilling their responsibilities under this section those named in subsection 1 shall consult on any proposals as defined in subsection (3) above with the Countryside Commission, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England and the Historic Buildings Council for Wales.

(5) The Secretary of State shall prior to issuing an order under this section in consultation with the Director General, take into account the views of the Countryside Commission, The Nature Conservancy Council, the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England and Wales, the Historic Buildings Council for Wales and other persons it is reasonable to expect him to consult.

(6) A person who, contravenes or fails to comply with an order issued under this section shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.

(7) Any person shall be entitled to lay a complaint of breach of any order under this section at any magistrates' court in England and Wales.

(8) This paragraph extends to England and Wales only.

Code of Practice for Environmental Conservation: Scotland

2.—(1) The Secretary of State in consultation with the Scottish Office of the Director General shall by order made by statutory instrument issue a code of practice with respect to environmental and recreational duties in Scotland for the purpose of:

(a) requiring, when formulating or considering any relevant proposals, each of the following, namely, any licence holder, any person authorised by an exemption to generate electricity, the Director and the Secretary of State,

(i) to further the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside (including its flora and fauna and geological and physiographical features) and of any features of archaeological interest there;

(ii) to further the protection of buildings, features and other objects of architectural or historic interest;

(iii) to promote energy conservation;

(iv) to, without prejudice to the generality of subsections 2(1)(a)(i) and (ii) above, to avoid causing injury, so far as possible, to fisheries or to the stock of fish in any waters;

(b) giving advice to any licence holder, and any authorised by exemption to generate electricity, with respect to any of the requirements in subsection 1(a) above;

(c) promoting practices that will further the requirements under subsection 1(a) above.

(2) In fulfilling their responsibilities those named in subsection 1 above shall:

(a) take into account any effect the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, buildings or objects, as described in subsection 1(a) above;

(3) In subsection 1 'relevant proposals' means:

(a) in relation to any licence holder or any person authorised by an exemption to generate electricity, any proposals, programme or series of proposals:

(i) for the construction, extension or operation of a generating station;

(ii) for the installation of an electric line, whether above or below ground;

(iii) for the execution of any other works for or connection with the generation, transmission or supply of electricity;

(b) in relation to the Director any proposals, programme or series of proposals which arise as a result of his general duties to promote the generation, and efficient use, of electricity;

(c) in relation to the Secretary of State, any proposals for which his consent is required for under this Act.

(4) In fulfilling their responsibilities under this section those named in subsection (1) shall consult on any proposals as defined in subsection (3) above with the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Fisheries Committee, the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland and the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland.

(5) The Secretary of State shall prior to issuing an order under this section in consultation with the Director General's office in Scotland, take into account the views of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Nature Conservancy Council, the Fisheries Committee, the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland and the Historic Buildings Council for Scotland, and other persons it is reasonable to expect him to consult.

(6) A person who contravenes or fails to comply with an order issued under this section shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine.

(7) Any person shall be entitled to seek a finding that there has been a breach of any order under this section by summary application in the sheriff court.

(8) This section applies to Scotland only.'.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: Government amendments Nos. 49, 50 and 90.

Amendment No. 155, in page 103, line 13, after 'fisheries', insert '(including fish farms)'.

Amendment No. 156, in page 103, line 17, at end add 'after consulting all relevant local authorities and such persons as appear to him to represent the interests of fishermen'.

Mr. Bruce: The thrust behind the amendment is self evident. It replaces the two paragraphs in schedule 9 with a much more strongly worded paragraph to ensure that the environmental commitment in the Bill is beefed up.

Effectively, schedule 9 sets out no more than the obligations imposed on the electricity supply industry in 1957. The Government should be able to do better than that when they are proposing to transfer that industry to the private sector more than 30 years later, especially when they claim to have a much higher commitment to environmental factors. Regrettably, the schedule is extremely weak. It uses phrases such as the industry

"shall have regard to the desirability of"

environmental factors and

"shall take into account any effect"

on the countryside. The amendment makes it a requirement on the industry "to further the conservation" of the countryside. The wording is much more positive and changes a weak, out-of-date statement of mild, good intent to a code of practice that specifically addresses environmental issues, particularly flora, fauna, buildings, fisheries and energy conservation. It takes into account the wider effect of the impact that the industry is now known to have on all aspects of the environment in a variety of radical ways.

The energy supply industry affects the health and welfare of every species on the planet, whether animals, birds, plants or human beings. It also affects buildings. You, Mr. Speaker, more than many may be aware of how much it affects buildings, considering the work done on this building in the past few years, why it cost much more than was originally estimated and why it required a much more radical programme of work than had been anticipated.

I understand that the contractors thought that the restoration of the building involved a cleaning process. I shall leave aside the much vaunted anecdote of the overspent parliamentary Committee of more than 100 years ago which toured the country at great expense looking for suitable stone. Its members may have been stoned more often than they sought stone because they came up with an unsatisfactory building material. The effects of acid rain on the atmosphere created by power stations in the London area led many statutes to fall apart when the contractors set to work on them. That is the sort of consideration that I hope we shall take into account in future. What is the point of cleaning buildings if we do not create the framework by which we prevent deterioration at the same rate in future generations?

The Minister may argue that that is a matter for broader regulations. Indeed, he has argued that it is not something that should be built into the industry's requirements but that the industry should simply respond to regulations imposed by the Government. I must take issue with him on that. The electricity supply industry has far too great an environmental impact not to be charged internally to promote the quality of the environment as a specific part of its brief under the licence which is, after all, issue to it by the director general and the Secretary of State. We should not pass a measure which does not make it absolutely clear that any licence holder who is generating electricity under the terms of the Bill must take specific account of the industry's impact on the environment.

I shall give some examples of the contribution of the electricity supply industry to some of our more significant environmental problems. It emits 233 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, accounting for 39 per cent. of the total output of carbon dioxide. That makes it a significant contributor to the greenhouse effect. It is perhaps also worth noting in passing that it does not make so much of a contribution that the replacement of fossil-fuelled power stations with a small number of nuclear power stations will significantly reduce that impact. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to charge the industry with trying to improve that record.

6.45 pm

Seventy-three per cent. of the sulphur dioxide discharged into the atmosphere comes from the electricity supply industry in the United Kingdom, as does 35 per cent. of the nitrous oxides. The nuclear industry makes a significant contribution to environmental problems because to date we have one and a half teaspoonfuls of high-level, radioactive waste for every man, woman and

[Mr. Bruce]

child in the country—all directly produced by the electricity supply industry and having significant implications for the environment. That has been stated previously and will no doubt be discussed again.

We have several examples of where the discharges from the industry have an effect on the flora and fauna of certain areas. In particular, in Cumbria, cattle and, if there is any significance in the bits of evidence, the local population are affected. Nobody can suggest that the electricity supply industry does not have a major impact on the environment.

That makes the Government's twin-track position on their legislation strange. This Bill and the Water Bill are going through the House simultaneously and both are recognised to have significant importance to the environment. The Government have tried to turn the attack on the Water Bill into a defence as they have argued that they will use the legislation to promote environmental improvements. In addition, they have attached a substantial environmental schedule to the Bill. It seems strange that Ministers in one Department should recognise that one Bill requires a major environmental provision built into it while Ministers in a different Department argue that there is no such necessity, particularly as many environmental groups agree with me that the impact of the electricity supply industry on the environment is greater than that of the water industry. The requirement for stringent environmental controls and action to promote environmental improvements is probably greater for the electricity supply industry than the water industry. It seems extraordinary that the Government are taking such an opposing view on this legislation compared with the Water Bill.

If the amendment were adopted, electricity supply companies would almost certainly appoint a director with specific responsibility for promoting the environment. The Minister may say, "The companies may in any case do that of their own volition", and they may. Unless they have a specific statutory responsibility to promote environmental protection and improvements, that will be purely fortuitous. It is certainly unlikely to be a pattern followed by every company, if indeed it is followed by any.

It is worth suggesting that the companies appoint such a director. The oil companies do. I know that Shell and British Petroleum have board directors with specific responsibility for the environment because they recognise the substantial environmental impact of the activities in which they are engaged.

I acknowledge that the responsibility under this provision should apply to all types of electricity generation. Although I am sceptical that the legislation will achieve it, I hope that there will be an increase in the generation of electricity through new, renewable alternative sources. If that is the case, as the Minister is fond of telling us, that will have an environmental impact. It is a favoured expression of the Minister that there is no form of generating electricity that does not have an environmental impact. It is perhaps a matter of judgment as to how great any intrusive environmental impact is, but I am prepared for the purposes of this debate to acknowledge what the Minister has said.

If over the next few years we have a significant increase in the number of proposals for electricity generation by tidal or wave power, that will have clear implications for our estuaries, our fisheries and, indeed, for the visual amenity of certain areas around our coasts. It could have implications for tourism and recreation, such as sailing and other water sports. I do not dispute that some of the benefits may be positive ones. That, again, is a matter of judgment. It is important to ensure, however, that, if the industry moves into those areas, it has a responsibility to ensure that it takes fully into account the environmental impacts and, indeed, produces environmental impact studies for such significant proposals.

Mr. Hardy: One smaller aspect of the matter that the hon. Gentleman may wish to consider is that the public sector electricity organisations have been most helpful and have frequently been good neighbours of the conservation movement. In Yorkshire, the board has been extremely supportive of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. I believe that that sort of comment could be generally applied. There is some anxiety that, when the industry becomes privately owned, it may not take such a helpful or good neighbourly view as has been displayed by the CEGB and number of the area boards.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, because he made an important point which I believe reinforces the purpose of my amendment. What is slightly worrying is that, in a sense, the Bill as it stands almost weakens the existing provisions for the industry. The hon. Gentleman has rightly said that the industry has over time started to do things over and above what is required of it and has built up a relationship with the conservation bodies. It would seem a wrong signal to go out from the House at this time to suggest that, at the very time when we are transferring the ownership to new generating companies—new licensees—that we should at the same time say that, if anything, the environmental restraints on those new companies are no greater, and may be marginally weaker, than has been the case since 1957. We are entitled to suggest that now is the time to build in all the existing best practice and make that the starting point of the environmental restraints that should be applied to the new licensees.

I make it clear that that is not what my amendment says. I am suggesting that that is what could be the result of the amendment if the provision for requiring a code of practice to be drawn up were written into the schedule. All that my amendment suggests is that there should be a code of practice. The Government's schedule, unamended, pretty well restates a rather weak, general statement of good intent without any real statutory force and without any requirement positively to promote environmental considerations. The intervention of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) was pertinent and reinforces my point.

In Committee we had a number of debates relating to the environmental impact of the industry on a smaller scale. We discussed, for example, the problem of overhead power lines. I believe that those should be taken into account in a number of different ways. We have perhaps over the past 30 or 40 years become slightly inured to the march of pylons across the countryside. They are very intrusive, and sometimes the line that is taken—partly because there may be no other option, but partly because it may be an easier and cheaper line—is especially intrusive. In certain parts of the country nobody can deny

that pylons have substantially spoiled the outlook and the amenity. Nobody could suggest that at this juncture we should suddenly say, "Right, under the new regime all power lines should be buried", but we should be raising the issue that it is desirable to bury them where appropriate and that it is desirable to consider even more strenuously routing them in a way that would minimise their impact. If we do not take a stand on this matter, the signal may be given that we are not changing the standards but are relaxing them.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Surely the hon. Gentleman is not seriously suggesting that in the Highlands of Scotland it would be practical, economical or wise to consider that one should continue to supply the remote hamlets and homes in any way other than with overhead lines. The alternative would prohibit that from happening.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman's intervention was perhaps superfluous, because I made it clear that I was not suggesting that we should do away with pylons. I was suggesting that we should look still more sensitively at their routing and their degree of intrusion, and, where appropriate, we should consider the possibility of burial. Even in the Highlands of Scotland, there are areas where in the most sensitive parts it may be appropriate—for example, where they are over the skyline and in the communities—to find a way of burying them. In my home village of Torphins there is a positive cat's cradle of overhead power lines right through the village, which I question to some extent on safety grounds, never mind on the grounds of visual amenity. They certainly spoil the outlook.

To be fair, we deal with this problem far better than they do in America, where the general visual effect of their power lines is much more intrusive than ours. However, there is no doubt that there is considerable scope for more sensitive routing, more visual sensitivity about the location of overhead lines and for considering burying some of the existing lines, especially in the most sensitive areas.

I am outlining the kind of things that should and could be dealt with in a code of practice such as is required by my amendment. No such code of practice is proposed by the Government, who have effectively said that it is not a matter for the Bill, as it is not an environment Bill and there is no requirement for building in environmental restraints. I would take issue fundamentally with the Minister. I do not deny that the Government have an additional responsibility to provide the regulatory framework and the environmental controls on a general basis with which all industry, and, indeed, all organisations that have a physical impact on the environment, should have to conform. I hope that over the next few years the Government will introduce a series of measures designed to do just that.

I believe that the Government are fundamentally wrong if they do not recognise that, unless they are built into the obligations of the companies at the outset, the environmental standards that are promoted will inevitably be weaker. Companies will be required to conform to external regulations only as and when they are introduced. My amendment seeks to provide that we should say to the directors, the shareholders and the management of the new companies who will operate under the licence of the Bill, "You must know from the first day on which you take up your responsibility that you are charged with a positive duty to promote environmental improvement. You must, first, consider everything that you are doing in terms of its environmental impact and minimise that impact and, secondly, review all the assets that you have in place and see whether you can find ways of reducing the impact".

There is no doubt that people are not simply looking for no greater despoliation in future. If that is all the Government are offering them, that is a fairly restricted way of tackling the environmental problems about which the Government claim to be concerned. What people want is action to repair some of the damage done in the past. No one can deny that the electricity supply industry has made a significant contribution to damage to the environment —by its very nature it is an intrusive industry. We need a better code of practice for the future in order to repair some of the damage. Therefore, this amendment is necessary and desirable.

7 pm

We intend to make sure that as the Bill passes through the House the Government are made aware of pressures from outside and from the Opposition. When they talk about the environment, we intend to try to ensure that that is translated into action. So far they have resisted every attempt to convert the Bill into one that will promote positive environmental improvement. For that reason, it is a retrograde step and I remain unconvinced by the Government's arguments, even at this stage. I hope that they will recognise that my amendment is a way of giving the Bill a genuine green tinge and that they will therefore accept it.

Mr. Hardy: I merely want to endorse the call for a code of practice which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has proposed.

Although I recognise that damage has been done to the environment, there have been pluses to which I referred during my intervention in the hon. Gentleman's speech. However, one is fearful about the prospect of that sort of attitude being maintained. I am deeply worried about that, not least because of the intervention by the hon. Member for Tayside North (Mr. Walker). He seemed to suggest that those of us who are anxious about pylons may be seeking to bury all existing transmission lines, but that is not so. I endorse the reply that the hon. Member for Gordon made. He may recall that I tabled a similar amendment in Committee, which was not accepted. I am not at all optimistic that the Government will accept this amendment.

There is a difference between the present situation and that which will follow privatisation. The British people may say that we must consider the public interest and that we should not do this, that or the other. Once privatised, a substantial proportion of the electricity industry will be owned by those seeking to make profits from their homes in foreign parts—Japan, California, West Germany or wherever. Why should they make a profit from the despoliation of our environment? That argument could be used to counter chauvinism and it would also ensure that there was a code of practice. The amendment is commendable.

If the amendment is not carried I hope that the less-disciplined and more-sensitive members of the other place will insist on a code of practice before the Bill reaches the statute book.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): We are debating an important series of amendments to an important part of the Bill. As time goes on we are becoming more conscious of the relationship between industry and the environment. It astounds me to compare the kind of commitment to consider the environment contained in the Bill with the positive impact which would be derived from the imposition of a code of practice.

Currently we are hearing much about commitment to green issues. In fact, the Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues now believe that green issues will be the dominant ones in the future. At the weekend some people even suggested that if the Government are to succeed for a fourth term green issues will come to the forefront of politics. Yet the lip service paid by the Government to the environment in this Bill suggests all talk and no action.

Let us look at the words included in schedule 9 as it presently stands:

"shall have regard to the desirability of . . . shall take into account any effect which the proposals would have".

Those words are totally meaningless. Unless there is a positive code of practice obliging the industry to look upon environmental issues positively it will get off lightly.

Although general issues are involved, I should like to deal with a specific interest of great concern to me—the nuclear power station in my constituency and its environmental impact. The decommissioning of that nuclear power station and whether there will be a replacement have been discussed on another occasion. We are unaware of the full environmental impact of decommissioning a nuclear power station. A few days ago there was an announcement about the decommissioning of an existing nuclear power station. The industry must be made aware of the concern of my constituents and people in other parts of the United Kingdom about this matter.

We are now supposed to be in the green age, or should I say a greener age, because a lot of us have been green for a long time. Some people have taken this issue on board recently. I accept that I am green in more than one way.

The amendment can also be recommended because it gives a firm commitment and promise that a code of practice would deal with energy conservation. Energy conservation is central to our argument against the Bill. Unless industry understands that there is merit in energy conservation, our country will continue to waste energy. I know what I am talking about because, as a son of a minister of religion, for many years I lived in large rambling manses with doors which did not fit and windows which let in draughts day and night. I know what is meant by the lack of a proper energy conservation policy because I suffered from it in my early days. I am sure that we have moved on a great deal since those days. The Minister will no doubt point out that these days building regulations do not allow that to happen. I am sure that he is right, but I regularly visit a number of properties that are energy inefficient and unless there is a positive commitment to energy conservation in a code of practice there will be no improvement.

We should be telling people that there are simple ways in which they can be energy efficient. I am sure that many of our existing electrical appliances are inefficient. When people are considering buying a new electrical appliance they should be persuaded to buy the one that is the most energy efficient. I accept, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr Bruce) has said, that the code of practice is not written on tablets of stone. The Government must consider ways to deal with conflicting demands. I accept that greater thought must be given to this matter, but it is one on which we should put greater store. I urge the Government to accept the amendment.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I shall be brief in supporting the amendment and mention amendments Nos. 155 and 156 which relate to fishing and which, although minor, raise a couple of important points. First, when talking about fisheries, we should include fish farms. The way that a power station operates may affect a fish farm and it is not clear in schedule 9 whether fish farms are included. I hope that the Minister will make it clear. Before the Secretary of State for Scotland appoints the members of the fisheries committee he should consult the professional, commercial fishermen in the industry and fishermen's associations to ensure that the organisation truly represents them.

One reason why we shall support the amendment involves fisheries. Schedule 9 and the fisheries committee relate only to water—to hydro power and other forms of water power stations. I do not understand why that should be so. Nuclear stations are often—certainly Hunterston on the Clyde and Dounreay in Caithness are—placed beside water and may have an impact on fishing.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: They are all next to water.

Mr. Maxton: Such stations may affect fishing but the fisheries committee does not cover nuclear power stations, only hydro stations.

I say to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) that a major stretch of pylons—not in his constituency—will be replaced over the next couple of years. That is—he will well know the word from Committee—the interconnector between Scotland and England, which will be upgraded right the way through to the southern uplands of Scotland. Much of it is, at present, scenically intrusive, as anyone who drives along the A74 will know.

I assume that the replacement, which will mean taking down the present pylons and replacing them with better power lines, will take better account of the scenic desirability and environmental suitability of their position so that they do not intrude on the environment—even if they are not placed underground, although, in some cases we should prefer them to go underground. I hope that we shall receive such a commitment.

I once took my family to Aviemore for a short holiday. We set off to see Urquhart castle on Loch Ness, from where one is supposed to see the Loch Ness monster. Unfortunately, travelling out from Inverness I took the wrong road and went down the wrong side of the loch. We eventually turned off the main road and finished at one of the ugliest little pieces of industrial dereliction that I have ever seen. I never worked out what the place was—there was a lot of waste metal, derelict buildings and overgrown weeds. About a month ago I was taken back to that place by the chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board to see the Foyers generating station.

The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) is important in this context. The environmental improvement carried out by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board at Foyers power station was something of which the board should be proud. It had renovated the old buildings, which are now protected and a fish farm was being run there. As far as it could be, the

place was attractive. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth quite rightly said that that is what a public organisation can do. A private company will not have the same concern for the environment as a public board.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) rightly dealt at length with how various aspects of the environment will be affected—not merely by pollution, although that is important. Other aspects affected include the scenery and the fishing stocks of particular waters. In Scotland, the scenery is not merely nice to enjoy, but is a major tourist attraction. If we despoil it, we could destroy our tourist industry. Like the hon. Member for Gordon, I believe that schedule 9 is not strong enough. If the Government—or, as the Friends of the Earth recently described them, the "bags", which is an unfair description of the Prime Minister but stands for "born-again greens"—are seriously committed to the environment they should consider accepting the amendment. If not, they should at least introduce other amendments in the other place to make the Bill much stronger.

7.15 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government believe that amendment No. 155, which extends the fisheries provision to fish farms, may be valid. We shall consider introducing measures to that end in the other place. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has caught a fish. Perhaps he did not expect to; he looks surprised. However, we think that the hon. Gentleman has a point and we shall certainly consider it.

The Government entirely agree with the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) who moved amendment No. 118. Some of the arguments in this debate will be circular. We agree about the importance of environmental considerations. Furthermore, we agree that the amenity obligation in schedule 9 can be further extended.

The purpose of the Government's amendments is to do precisely that. We have already ensured, within the terms of the Bill, something which was not there before, which is that the terms of the schedule should apply to private undertakings as well as to public utilities. We shall further extend it to ensure that it includes exempted suppliers, for instance people generating for their own use and various small generators.

However, we must take issue with the general proposition that the hon. Member for Gordon places before the House—that a code of practice should be included in the Bill. We do so for several reasons, to some of which the hon. Gentleman has already alluded. It is true that, under the Bill, the regulator already has a duty to promote energy efficiency. That is a substantial point of development. The Opposition have sneered at it from time to time, but this is the first time that such duties have been set out in a Bill.

We argue strongly that opening the industry to new forms of energy production and new players will ensure a more efficient use of energy. It will make sense in terms of the commercial decisions taken and the type of investment brought forward.

Above all, as the hon. Member for Gordon recognised, the Government believe that a panoply of regulations surround the industry, some of which are extremely tough. Several mentions have been made by us and others to sulphur dioxide emissions, the restrictions which those will impose on industry and the necessity for the industry to reduce such emissions by 60 per cent. by the year 2003.

The regulations are real and the industry will have to gear itself up to comply with them. There are signs that that message is sinking in fast in the industry. Some of the recent pronouncements of the chairman-designate of PowerGen, Mr. Malpas, clearly show that there is a new recognition of the industry's need to comply with the regulations and to bring in innovations to do so. The hon. Member for Gordon referred to the directors who are responsible for these matters and their concern about the environment; such concern may well spread in response to the need by companies to comply with the regulations.

By way of an example, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Given the state of technology and the fact that our industry is so dependent on coal for producing electricity, there is a limit to what can be done directly about these emissions. Of course, we all want a breakthrough—one thinks of the application of the technologies at Grimethorpe, for instance. Opposition Members do not agree that nuclear power and other forms of non-fossil power fit well into a programme of cutting back on CO_2 emissions. We are surprised that the hon. Member for Gordon advances his code of practice, for which there are perfectly respectable arguments, and specifies the need to control CO_2 emissions at the same time as fervently opposing our proposals for the nuclear industry. I am sure he accepts what we are doing about renewables, but renewables technology is new.

I could go on at great length about what we are doing outside the scope of the Bill with the development of impact studies, and so on. In Committee, I said that even generating stations with a capacity of less than 300 MW might have to have environmental impact studies done on them. There is already a mass of regulations; the only point in dispute is our contention that this is not the Bill in which to introduce such measures. We must ensure—we have ensured—that the electricity industry after privatisation complies with these increasingly tough environmental regulations——

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is aware that a code of environmental practice has been considered necessary in the water industry legislation. Will he provide us with an insight into why it is necessary in that legislation but not in this?

Mr. Spicer: Water is integral to the environment. Of course, electricity has an impact on it, but, unlike water, it is not part of the environment as it is usually defined. It is perfectly rational to include environmental considerations in the water measure, which, after all, is largely to do with improving the environment and increasing regulations. The regulations that affect electricity, and other industries, are growing in number. The Bill ensures that the industry meets the requirements of the regulations, which is why I hope that the hon. Member for Gordon will feel able to withdraw his amendment. We have had these arguments before, and he may well remain firm in his view, as we shall in ours.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Minister is probably anticipating the inevitable. His reply was unsatisfactory in a number of ways. He said that the scope of the schedule was being extended to include additional people. I do not

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

deny that, but my amendment relates more to the coverage than to the scope of the schedule. The Minister is doing nothing to increase the positive requirements to take appropriate action.

Secondly, the Minister drew a rather lame distinction between the electricity supply industry and the water industry and their respective environmental impacts. I suggest that the Government start to consider including in Bills, in much the same way as they include money resolutions, a statement of their environmental implications. That would ensure that a significant statement was attached to this Bill. It is extraordinary that the Government resist a schedule that merely includes a code of practice with the positive requirement to promote and improve the environment. The Government have produced their own code of practice for the benefit of the Committee that is scrutinising the Water Bill. If they want to convince anyone that they are genuinely committed to the environment, they must recognise that environmental responsibility must be integral to the functioning of an industry such as the electricity industry which has a strong impact on the environment.

The Minister discussed the environmental impact of the greenhouse effect and CO_2. I do not intend to pursue that argument, except to say that a code of practice can deal with all these matters. It can determine what the balance of priorities should be, and the relative impacts of alternative and established technologies. It can determine the balance between the output from fossil-fuel power stations and the possibility of switching to the use of more gas or nuclear power stations. Nothing in my amendment charges the industry with a preconceived mix. It merely says that there should be a code of practice.

I am convinced that the Government have utterly failed to recognise this Bill's importance as an environmental measure. Their refusal to accept this amendment shows that they are prepared to go ahead and unleash an industry that has a massive impact on the environment without imposing adequate constraints on the private sector. I shall certainly divide the House on the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 256.

Division No. 149] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Roberts, Allan *(Bootle)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Menzies Campbell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*

Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Watts, John
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 49, in page 102, line 13, after 'generate', insert 'or supply'.

No. 50, in page 102, line 23, after 'generate', insert 'or supply'.

No. 90, in page 102, line 38, after 'generate', insert 'or supply'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 38

Information with respect to levels of performance

Amendments made: No. 51, in page 31, line 1, leave out 'from time to time' and insert 'at least once in every year'.

No. 52, in page 31, line 5, leave out 'such' and insert 'public electricity'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 40

Fixing of maximum charges for reselling electricity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I beg to move amendment No. 111, in page 32, line 35, leave out 'maximum prices' and insert 'a maximum price'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 112, in page 32, line 39, leave out subsection (3).

No. 113, in page 32, line 46, at end, insert—

'(4) Nothing in this section shall be used by private or other landlords to enable a profit to be made from reselling electricity to tenants.'.

Mr. Bruce: I shall speak only briefly because this matter was raised in Committee. We feel that the issue is worth raising again at this stage to see whether the Government are prepared to acknowledge the nature of the problem. The purpose of these amendments is to prevent landlords

[Mr. Bruce]

from making a profit out of the resale of electricity. In Committee, I said that the agreement between the landlord and tenant relates to rent, and that it is wrong that people who are given a rent that they accept as the basis on which they are to pay then have to pay a high rate for electricity as a means of the landlord supplementing the rent that he charges. This applies to a variety of accommodation, but particularly to furnished accommodation on both short and long-term lets and to holiday homes. I make no distinction; in all cases, the resale of electricity at a profit is a means of getting additional revenue from tenants, and we wish to prevent that.

In Committee, the Government raised practical objections to our proposal, saying that it was difficult to determine what was profit as opposed to genuine cost. The amendments make clear our intention to ensure that if a landlord incurs costs associated with the provision of electricity over and above the straight cost that he is paying to the supply company, he should be entitled to cover them. Nobody is suggesting that he should not. However, he should not be entitled to add a profit margin, particularly when such charging is inadequately controlled. There have been frequent rip-offs, and substantial premiums have been charged.

The purpose of these amendments is straightforward. It is to ensure that it would be made an offence to sell electricity on to a tenant at a profit over and above the cost of buying it. That is a reasonable proposition. When a landlord wants more money from a tenant, that should be incorporated in the rent. That is particularly true given the liberalisation of the rent laws promoted by the Government. In the past, over-charging on electricity was one way that landlords got round the Rent Acts. Those Acts no longer apply, so there is no justification for this practice continuing.

The only people who should be making a profit are the supply companies. Introduce a middleman and consumers are ripped off. Often, they are those who are the most disadvantaged and weak. I hope that the Minister will accept that that is undesirable. If he cannot agree to the amendments, perhaps he can tell us how such a provision could be incorporated into the codes of practice or how our aim could be achieved by some other method.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has pointed out, the arguments on the resale of electricity by landlords were extensively rehearsed in Committee, but the Government appear to have chosen to ignore the points that were made then. I support the amendments, in particular as they relate to the ability of the landlord to profit from the resale of electricity through overcharging. The provisions of the Electricity Act 1957 have simply been restated in this Bill. They allow a maximum resale price for electricity, but there is an abuse of that and evidence of overcharging and profiteering by landlords.

The resale of electricity mainly affects people in the lower income brackets, people who may be less able to pay such profiteering prices. They are people who live in caravans and mobile homes, short-term accommodation or private rented accommodation. As a result of other recent legislation, tenancies have been altered, and we must bear in mind that a tenant who complains about being overcharged for electricity may be on an assured shorthold tenancy that lasts for six months. Naturally, he will be reluctant to upset his landlord by complaining that he is being overcharged for electricity.

7.45 pm

The methods by which electricity can be sold by a landlord to a tenant are extensive, and are set out in a document produced in 1985 by the Director General of Fair Trading. The document draws attention to the resale of electricity by landlords and points out that overcharging occurred to a great extent, but the Government have ignored that report. As the document says, these methods include:

> "(a) The rent may be inclusive of electricity, the actual amount charged for it not being stated.
> (b) There may be a separate charge made for electricity in addition to the rent, on the basis of an agreed fixed amount, which may however be subject to variations in electricity costs or consumption.
> (c) The landlord may supply two or more tenancies with electricity and apportion the total charge among them (eg two 'bed-sits' in one house).
> (d) The tenant may obtain electricity by inserting coins into a sub-meter which is either owned by the landlord or owned by the Electricity Board, but allocated to the landlord's account.
> (e) The tenant may pay for electricity in accordance with the amount used (which may be based on the readings on the landlord's credit meter)."

The basic point is that the tenant often does not have access to the meter to determine how much electricity he has used, although the landlord does have access to the meter. The tenant has no way of measuring the amount of electricity that he has used or of comparing that to the price that he is being charged.

As I pointed out, under the Electricity Act 1957, area boards set a maximum charge for the resale of electricity, but the Act did not set out powers to enforce the maximum charge. Again, the Bill has no clause to enable the enforcement of the maximum charge. All that there is in the Bill is a simple carry-over of the provisions of the 1957 Act, which the director general's report shows to be unsatisfactory.

For the tenant who feels that he is being overcharged for electricity, the only avenue for redress is to make an application in the county court. This can be a daunting task, particularly if the tenant is unsure of his tenancy or does not wish to embroil himself in a dispute with his landlord that would involve him in taking his landlord to court. He is also faced with the difficulty of finding out in the first instance whether he is being overcharged or whether the landlord is merely conforming to the maximum resale price. Without such information, it will be difficult to challenge the charges.

The sale of other fuels is subject to the criminal law, but it is not a criminal offence to overcharge for electricity when it is resold. The Government should have addressed themselves to this anomaly when drafting the Bill. The Weights and Measures Act 1963 makes it a criminal offence to overcharge for coal, smokeless fuel, petrol, paraffin and liquid gas. Unfortunately, that Act does not apply to the resale of electricity. That can be compared with what happens when a consumer is late in paying his bill or cannot pay because of financial difficulties. In that case, the law is imposed with some force, the supply is disconnected and the person is sued for that amount by the area board or the supplier.

The first recommendation should be that the resale of electricity for a profit be prohibited. Overcharging by

landlords should be made a criminal offence as that would act as a deterrent. There is the argument that charging for electricity should be brought into line with charging for other fuels and within the remit of the 1963 Act. It is important to note that within the next few days the Government will be supporting a private Member's Bill that seeks substantially to amend the 1963 Act.

The burden should be taken from the tenant when it comes to taking action. There are considerable difficulties facing a tenant when he tries to ascertain whether he has been overcharged. If he takes that course and finds that he has been overcharged, he faces further difficulties in trying to find a remedy. The recommendations of the director general should be accepted and implemented.

Mr. Barron: The Minister will probably remember the debate in Committee during which we discussed the issues to which my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) has referred. We discussed whether the reselling of electricity at rates that could be assumed to be higher than normal should be a criminal offence. The Minister said in reply that under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 the Department of Trade and Industry was about to issue new regulations for the metering of gas and electricity. That debate took place in February, and we should like to know whether the regulations to which the Minister referred are likely to be introduced before the Bill complete its passage through Parliament.

Will the regulations require a landlord to itemise electricity bills? If he is reselling electricity, will he have to itemise the bills that he submits to a tenant? We were told that it would be a criminal offence if a landlord did not set out the price of the electricity in the bill that he submitted to the tenant or in the rent book. We need to know exactly what the Department of Trade and Industry is proposing. We must see the regulations before the Bill completes its passage through the House. I hope that the House will excuse the pun when I say that we are in the dark.

Amendments have been tabled that seek to protect tenants from the criminal acts of some landlords who resell electricity. We do not know whether the DTI regulations will be as effective as the introduction of a criminal offence so that those who infringed the law could be taken before a court and punished. I hope that the Minister will tell us when we can expect the new regulations to be introduced. There must be protection from excessive charges for the reselling of electricity.

Mr. Lang: I understand the anxieties that led to the tabling of the amendment by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). I understand also the anxieties expressed by the hon. Members for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). However, I do not accept the implication behind the amendment that all landlords are rogues and exploiters. At the same time, I understand that the amendment refers to an area of sensitivity about which there are legitimate concerns. This group of amendments would have the effect of permitting the director to fix only one maximum price at which electricity might be resold. It would prohibit a landlord from making a profit when selling electricity to his tenants. There are practical reasons, apart from any others, that make it impossible to accept the amendments.

Amendments Nos. 111 and 112 would severely disadvantage many consumers. It is essential that the director's power to fix maximum prices at which electricity may be resold should enable him to fix different prices to suit different circumstances and types of supply. The area boards' current system of tariffs identifies a number of different classes of consumer. The prices charged to the different classes reflect the different characteristics of supply for each class and the cost incurred in providing different supplies. We expect the system to continue in future.

The power given to the director by clause 40 will enable him to set a different maximum resale price for each tariff class if he considers it necessary to do so. He will be able to set a maximum resale price that will apply for domestic supplies. He will be able also to set a maximum price for commercial and industrial consumers.

I thought that the hon. Member for Gordon might draw an analogy with British Gas. In the event, he did not. The Director General of Gas Supply can set only one maximum retail price for gas because there is only one gas tariff. To permit the director to set only one maximum resale price for electricity would mean that if he were adequately to cover all classes he would have to set the price at a level that corresponded to the highest tariff rate. That would clearly be inequitable for those purchasing electricity from a landlord who was supplied at a lower rate. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman identified this problem himself. Having tabled amendments Nos. 111 and 112, he tabled amendment No. 113, which would introduce a new subsection (4). That would prevent a landlord making a profit from reselling electricity. In a sense, amendment No. 113 is designed to counter the effect of amendments Nos. 111 and 112. As I think I have demonstrated, the first two amendments are unacceptable and the third would not be necessary. It is in the interests of consumers that the director should have the powers that are given to him under clause 40. I understand also, of course, the anxiety about possible exploitation of tenants by landlords.

It is fair to say that landlords incur costs in the supply of electricity. Those costs could include the provision, installation and maintenance of a meter, the installation and maintenance of electric wiring and meter reading, billing and collection. Some landlords may make a small loss in reselling electricity while others may make a profit. These are all factors that the director will need to take into account in setting the maximum retail price. It would be impossible to examine every landlord's costs. The complexities and subjectivity of identifying the costs would make enforcement extremely difficult.

I can offer the hon. Member for Gordon some consolation and respond to the issues raised by the hon. Members for Barnsley, Central and Rother Valley. We are concerned, as are hon. Members, with the need to protect consumers. We cannot prevent some landlords from making a small profit, but we have taken steps to ensure that a landlord cannot recover from a tenant more than he is entitled to charge.

The regulations which were mentioned in Committee and to which the hon. Member for Rother Valley referred are to be introduced by the Department of Trade and Industry later this year under the Consumer Protection Act 1987. They will relate specifically to the resale of gas and electricity and will require landlords who resell electricity or gas to tenants for domestic use other than through a fixed charge in the rent to provide itemised bills that show the number of units charged for, the rate at which the electricity has been supplied, and the statutory maximum rate. A landlord who fails to provide this

[Mr. Lang]

information adequately will be committing an offence and will be liable to prosecution by a trading standards officer. It will be an additional offence to that of giving a misleading indication of price, which is provided for already in the Consumer Protection Act.

The proposals, which have already been circulated in draft, have been welcomed by the Electricity Consumers Council, other consumer bodies and local authority trading standards organisations. We believe that they are the right way forward to deal with a possible abuse of the system. I hope that, in the light of my comments, the hon. Member for Gordon will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I am grateful to the Minister for his comments. I accepted in my opening remarks that there are some practical difficulties. I am pleased that the Minister has acknowledged that the abuse that has existed should be removed from the system. It was never defensible when the industry was in the public sector and it would be even less defensible following the transfer of the industry to the private sector.

I am encouraged by what the Minister says about the regulations that are coming forward. I acknowledge that clause 40, even without the amendments, allows the director to fix maximum prices. In a sense, the purpose of tabling the amendments and initiating this short debate is to give to the director a clear sign of the feeling within the House and to highlight the abuses that we are anxious to have removed. I hope, therefore, that the Director General of Electricity Supply, reinforced by the regulations about which the Minister talked, will ensure that, apart from minor adjustments on a technical basis, the practice of selling electricity to sitting tenants at a substantial profit and as a means of supplementing the rent will not continue in any worthwhile commercial sense. That will not happen automatically because of the measures that have been tabled, but there is unanimity on both sides of the House about the desirability of ending that practice. In those circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

8 pm

Clause 44

PUBLICATION OF INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Mr. Lang: I beg to move amendment No. 53, in page 34, line 46, at end insert—

'(3) The Director General of Fair Trading shall consult the Director before publishing under section 124 of the 1973 Act any information or advice which may be published by the Director under this section.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendments Nos. 54 to 63.

Mr. Lang: This is a group of technical amendments. Amendments Nos. 53 and 55 relate to clauses 44 and 46 respectively and are aimed at preventing the wasteful duplication of effort. Amendment No. 54 relates to clause 45 and adds to the information held on the public register kept by the director general. Amendments Nos. 56 to 63 relate to clause 53 and provide additional disclosure gateways through which information may be disclosed to specified statutory or public bodies.

Amendment No. 63 arises from an undertaking that I gave in Committee to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) to consider whether it would be appropriate for environmental health departments to be included in the list of organisations to which information might be disclosed. He believed that councils should have access to information about excessive discharges of dirt and dust. I understand that the legislative plans of the Department of the Environment include giving local authorities greater power over air emissions so that operators will need local authority consent before plants can operate.

We do not think that it is necessary to include environmental health departments in the list now, but I have carefully considered the hon. Gentleman's point. Amendment No. 63 is designed to empower the Secretary of State to make orders creating gateways to such departments or other organisations as appropriate in the future. There is the possibility that not only could we meet the hon. Gentleman's point should the need arise, despite the further powers to be given to local authorities on air emissions, but we could go wider and include other organisations.

Mr. Doran: In introducing amendments Nos. 53 and 55 the Minister mentioned that one of the aims was to prevent the wasteful duplication of effort. I believe that by removing the obligation on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to include references by the director general under the Bill, additional effort may be required to have an overview of the commission's work. Has the Minister considered that point?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman's suggestion goes further than the Bill's provisions. The director general will take a close interest in such matters anyway and has adequate powers to keep an eye on them. To suggest that there should be some further change in powers to oversee the activities of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission is to go further than the Bill's provisions.

Mr. Doran: There has been a misunderstanding. My understanding of the amendment is that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Director General of Fair Trading are not required in their reports to mention referrals by the Director General of Electricity Supply under the Bill. I am concerned with the overview of the work of those two other bodies which these clauses affect. The legislation may create extra work.

Mr. Lang: That is not the intention, nor is it our expectation.

Mr. Morgan: The Minister said that the Secretary of State may wish to make orders following new legislation about clean air monitoring and the powers of local authorities, so surely the hon. Gentleman recognises that environmental health departments of borough and local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland already have clean air responsibilities. It is peculiar to leave this aspect out of the legislation. Is the hon. Gentleman considering tabling a further amendment in another place?

Mr. Lang: We are not contemplating that at the moment. It would not be sensible to reopen the debate that we had in Committee on clause 52 when we considered the

matter in detail and made clear the limited context in which the clause operated. It was clear that the various gateways provided in the Bill were adequate. I undertook to consider the point further both in the context of the specific point of dust and dirt to which the hon. Gentleman referred and in the general context. We have now come forward with a power to enable the Secretary of State to add names to the schedule by regulation, and I think that that is a desirable way forward. Hon. Members are at one in that purpose and we believe that our amendment meets the practical needs of the situation.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 45

KEEPING OF REGISTER

Amendment made: No. 54 in page 35, line 6 after 'and', insert

'every exemption granted to a particular person;

(aa)'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 46

ANNUAL AND OTHER REPORTS

Amendment made: No. 55, in page 36, line 16 at end insert—

'(6) Section 125(1) of the 1973 Act (annual and other reports) shall not apply to activities of the Monopolies Commission on which the Director is required to report by this section.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 52

GENERAL RESTRICTIONS ON DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

Amendments made: No. 56, in page 38, line 28, after 'Authority', insert—

'(viia) the Insolvency Practitioners Tribunal;'.

No. 57, in page 38, line 32, after 'enactments', insert 'or instruments'.

No. 58, in page 38, line 32, at end insert—

'(bb) for the purpose of enabling or assisting the Secretary of State to exercise any powers conferred on him by the Financial Services Act 1986 or by the enactments relating to companies, insurance companies or insolvency or for the purpose of enabling or assisting any inspector appointed by him under the enactments relating to companies to carry out his functions;

(bc) for the purpose of enabling or assisting an official receiver to carry out his functions under the enactments relating to insolvency or for the purpose of enabling or assisting a recognised professional body for the purpose of section 391 of the Insolvency Act 1986 to carry out its functions as such;'.

No. 59, in page 38, line 38, after 'enactments', insert 'or instruments'.

No. 60, in page 38, line 41, after 'enactments', insert 'and instruments'.

No. 61, in page 39, line 6, at end insert—

'(kk) the Insolvency Act 1986;'.

No. 62, in page 39, line 7, at end insert—

'(m) any subordinate legislation made for the purpose of securing compliance with the Directive of the Council of the European Communities dated 10th September 1984 (No. 84/450/EEC) on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states concerning misleading advertising.'.

No. 63, in page 39, line 7, at end insert—

'(3A) The Secretary of State may by order provide that subsections (2) and (3) above shall have effect subject to such modifications as are specified in the order.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 59

INTERPRETATION ETC. OF PART I

Amendments made: No. 64, in page 43, line 41, at end insert—

'"generating station" in relation to a generating station wholly or mainly driven by water, includes all structures and works for holding or channelling water for a purpose directly related to the generation of electricity by that station;'.

No. 65, in page 44, line 13, leave out '7(2)' and insert '16(1)'—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 60

TRANSFER OF PROPERTY ETC. OF AREA BOARDS

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): I beg to move amendment No. 189, in page 44, line 40, after 'property' insert

'(except dwelling houses in the Board's ownership let or leased to Board employees, which such employees have registered a wish to purchase)'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 190, in clause 61, page 45, line 9, after 'property', insert

'(except dwelling houses in the Generating Board's ownership let or leased to Board employees which such employees have registered a wish to purchase)'.

Mr. Alison: This probing amendment is designed to elicit information and reassurances from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State affecting the right-to-buy prospects of some CEGB tenants who live at Barlow near Drax in my constituency. Strictly speaking, the CEGB is not subject to the right-to-buy legislation in the Housing Act 1980, but there are a number of other public bodies which likewise are not subject to that legislation which still operate it in practice and in the spirit of the 1980 Act. For example, some police authorities sell surplus police houses to their officers at discounts equivalent to those obtaining under the right-to-buy policy. British Coal sells former National Coal Board houses to tenants at half their market value—at 50 per cent. discounts. I am advised that no less than three-quarters of all former NCB houses have already been sold to their tenants.

I am glad to say that, like the police authorities to which I referred and British Coal, the CEGB has accepted the spirit of the 1980 Act and has announced and, I believe, promulgated to some extent a policy of selling some of its rented properties to its tenants who wish to buy. Of course, nothing like as many houses are involved with the CEGB. I think that the generating board has only about 170 houses and flats in England and Wales. However, in respect of some of the CEGB rented properties at Barlow near Drax, I am not entirely happy that the generating board is measuring up fully to the spirit of the Housing Act 1980 or to the scale of generosity of discounts either as provided for local authority tenants under the Act or as voluntarily operated by, for example, British Coal. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State may be able to reassure me. If so, I shall not press the amendment.

When I last met my Barlow constituents, a number of them had been waiting for an offer for sale for years, sometimes right back to 1981. That is a long time to wait, especially when one realises that the 1980 Act provides

[Mr. Alison]

time limits which local authorities must observe in disposing of houses to tenants who wish to buy. Moreover, all the potential Barlow buyers have been offered discounts only within the modest range of 20 to 30 per cent. When one considers how house prices have risen in Yorkshire recently, that leaves a large mortgage to be raised by a potential purchaser. I am hoping that my hon. Friend can say that better discounts may be forthcoming.

Let me remind my hon. Friend and the House of the going rate of discounts elsewhere. The present discount level for council houses starts at 32 per cent. after two years' occupation, with an additional 1 per cent. discount for each extra year of occupation, and the maximum discount is no less than 60 per cent. reached after 30 years' occupation. The discount for flats starts at 44 per cent. after two years' occupation and increases by 2 per cent. for each extra year of occupation, reaching a maximum of 70 per cent. after 15 years' occupation. One should compare that to the maximum discount offered by the CEGB. I was advised recently—although it may be flexible and my hon. Friend may be able to reassure me—that it is only 30 per cent. Police authorities sell houses surplus to requirements to police officers at discount rates equivalent to those I have I have cited for local authorities. I have already mentioned that British Coal disposes of its properties at a 50 per cent. discount.

Since constituents at Barlow first raised the matter of discounts with me, I have had some correspondence with the CEGB property services manager for the north of England, Mr. K. J. Howes, at Harrogate and with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I am glad to say that Mr. Howes has taken an active interest in the satisfactory disposal of the Barlow houses to the tenants, but I am still not quite clear about the level of discounts that may be offered. That is relevant to the attitude I take towards the amendment. I hope that my hon. Friend can give me some encouragement and belief that discounts closer to those applying in local authorities, or as operated by British Coal or some police authorities, may be under consideration by the CEGB.

It would be of great interest if my hon. Friend could tell me what will become of the right-to-buy prospects of tenants who have not yet decided that they want to buy, but who may decide to buy in the next few years, when the properties move from the ownership of the CEGB to the ownership of the new, big trading body. Will there be any moral—obviously, not legislative—obligation on the new owners to do what the police, British Coal and the outgoing CEGB have all done, which is to accept a moral obligation to match in some respects the local authority rights under the Housing Act 1980? Perhaps my hon. Friend will be kind enough to advise us about those points.

8.15 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: I must say first to my right hon. Friend, as a matter of generality, that clauses 60 and 61 provide for all property rights and liabilities of the area boards—and of the CEGB in the case of clause 61—to be transferred to the successor companies nominated for the purpose by the Secretary of State. We would not want to change that generality. Secondly, my information is that the Barlow example is the only large group of houses that raises the problem that he has, quite properly, brought before the House this evening. There are a handful of other similar properties for which the CEGB does not envisage any problem in negotiating the sale to the occupiers.

I can tell my right hon. Friend that the CEGB is seeking to reach a satisfactory conclusion with the Barlow tenants involved and hopes to be able to complete the sales before the end of 1989. In direct answer to the point raised, should it be impossible for any reason to do that, I would expect National Power, to which the houses in question are expected to be transferred, to honour the intention of the CEGB to sell on terms to be agreed with the incumbent tenants. Although I would not wish to intervene in the matter, should there be any unreasonable difficulties about the terms of the sales, I would want to make inquiries myself of the CEGB to discover what the problem was. However, I am hopeful, as is the CEGB, that the matter can be resolved before the transfer takes place. If that is not the case, I would expect the sale to take place under the successor companies.

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend was kind enough to suggest that he would keep a watching brief on the matter. Will the watching brief extend specifically to the question of the ultimate discounts offered? I am not asking him to be specific about an acceptable level, although I have described what I feel is a lowish level of discount. If I complain to my hon. Friend that the discounts remain too ungenerous, will my hon. Friend agree to intervene or at least to have a look at the matter?

Mr. Spicer: As my right hon. Friend no doubt senses, I am extremely anxious not to become involved myself as it would not be appropriate. However, if I felt that any action taken was totally unreasonable or was a wrecking proposition, I would want to know about it. There is no compulsion on discount rates, but it is the board's intention that the houses should be sold. I would want to be reassured that there was nothing unreasonable in the proposals, but I cannot give my right hon. Friend any guarantees about the precise rate of discounts, nor would he expect me to do so.

Mr. Barron: This is a fascinating scenario. Will the Minister take into account that coal miners who supplied the old Drax power station and the new one have, since the mid-1970s, received a 50 per cent. discount on their public body houses from the former National Coal Board? It seems grossly unfair that another public body is thinking of selling its properties with lower discounts than that.

Mr. Spicer: That is a rather helpful intervention. It is interesting to know that the official Opposition support my right hon. Friend. I repeat that I would want to be sure that no unreasonable proposition had been made. It is helpful to have the Opposition's views on record in a positive and helpful way.

Mr. Lofthouse: The Minister mentioned that the purchase of the houses would take place before privatisation—if possible. Surely it must be possible. Those people to whom the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) referred have been waiting for years and we are talking about only a small batch of houses. It should be possible to tie up such a deal before privatisation with the goodwill of the CEGB. The CEGB is morally obliged to give similar discounts to those given by local authorities.

Mr. Spicer: I shall ensure that as soon as *Hansard* comes off the presses tomorrow morning, we shall run hot foot to the CEGB and explain that the Opposition are now enthusiastic about the sale of public sector houses to the private sector with appropriate discounts. It is extremely good news and I shall ensure that the Opposition's views are drawn to the attention of the CEGB as soon as *Hansard* comes off the presses tomorrow.

Mr. Alison: On the basis of the assurance that my hon. Friend has kindly given—particularly in his commitment to the concept of reasonableness as a trigger, now also adumbrated by Opposition Members having regard to local authority and National Coal Board discounts—I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Morgan: I beg to move amendment No. 223, in page 44, line 48, at end add—

'(2A)(1) Six months after the date of transfer of all property rights and liabilities of each Area Board, the company nominated in accordance with this section shall publish a valuation of

(a) Those capital assets of the Area Board utilised for the transmission of electricity; and

(b) Those capital assets of the Area Board not so utilised.

(2) Such valuations shall be based on the open market value of said assets at the date appointed by the Secretary of State under subsection (1) above.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 161, in clause 61, page 45, line 14, leave out '(b)' and insert—

'(bb) the Secretary of State shall make proper and reasonable provision for retention of the transmission system in public ownership.'.

Mr. Morgan: I read with interest in this morning's *Financial Times* that a double Olympic gold medal had been awarded to a Conservative Back Bencher, the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), and a junior Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs. They had been the hon. Members to vote most consistently in accordance with the views of the Adam Smith Institute and were deemed to be the most freedom-oriented hon. Members. I note that the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) is looking surprised that he did not win it. I understand that the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs had been taking steroids in an attempt to achieve an outright win, but he did not make it.

Hon. Members may be mystified as to the relevance of my remarks. It is that, given their views on the national grid, the Secretary of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will not win such an award. They must have thought about selling the national grid as a private company, but they funked it. This is the appropriate stage at which to consider why they decided that the national grid should remain at one remove from the market. They have not kept it in the public sector, as we ask them to do in amendment No. 161, but they are not committing it to the furnace of the free market either. It will have semi-privatised status. Nobody will be able to touch it. Market forces will not be able to touch it and, although it will be owned by the 12 area boards, they will not be able to mess about with it much either. They cannot make a commercial asset out of it. It will be a separate plc with its own capital budget and non-executive directors and the area boards will not be able to determine what happens to it.

Why is that? Is it a curious omission of the Government, or is it a recognition by them that certain aspects of the electricity industry constitute public infrastructure rather than business? There are business aspects to all infrastructure provision and many businesses are also infrastructure. Part of the electricity industry is a heating business, as is British Gas, but only 25 per cent. or less of the electricity industry is a competitor for British Gas, which has already been part privatised, with 51 per cent. of the shares being sold. The Government seem to recognise that electricity and the national grid are part of the infrastructure. There are security of supply and national security arguments at stake, and the national grid thus falls clearly within the definition of infrastructure.

The importance of the Government's funking the issue and their willingness to give up their Adam Smith Institute gold medals for another year or so lies in the fact that they recognise that problems arise when one permits full risk-bearing equity participation in certain types of businesses. Those are businesses from which the public has a right to expect something. The fact that the demands of the Government and the public can be expected to weigh heavily on such businesses makes them totally inappropriate for full risk-bearing equity participation which allows a company to go bust or to make an absolute fortune. The Opposition believe that that is unacceptable for the electricity industry as a whole, and even the Government recognise that it is not acceptable to submit the national grid to those conditions—to the risk of going bust or to the opportunity of exploiting its monopoly position to make a fortune.

The Government are now telling us, "The industry is not that kind of industry". In that case, why not go the whole hog and leave it in the public sector, where we believe it belongs? We hope that we shall see a flicker of recognition—even if there is no cross-voting on the issue—of the fact that, although the Minister's American guru recommended that the national grid should become a private sector transmission company, the Government have had to concede that, although that may be possible in the United States, we cannot do it in Britain. If they concede that, amendment No. 161 represents the obvious solution.

Some other aspects of the national grid are worth thinking about. The Government have structured the National Grid Company so that it can transmit, and has the obligation to try to transmit, cheap electricity economically and efficiently to comply with security of supply regulations and facilitate competition in the generating industry. One thing that it cannot do is to buy and sell electricity. Why is that? Why are not the Government willing to make the national grid the wholesaler of electricity—as it is now for all practical purposes? Why have they removed that capability? The reason is that it would make it far more difficult for private generators to enter the industry if the nation grid could buy and retail on to the area boards or big industrial consumers.

The Government have made a serious mistake—which will cost the consumer hundreds of millions of pounds every year—by denying the national grid its natural role in the wholesale purchase and retail distribution of electricity to the area boards. The reason for that is simple. Under the

[Mr. Morgan]

new system, if a major supplier such as National Power suffers from a major technical problem, it will be more difficult to deal with it. Ludicrous though it may seem, large and small power stations at the edge of the sea sometimes suffer when sea water covers their cooling water intake screens. If that happens, the power station has to be knocked off and thousands of megawatts have to come off line.

Under the present system, the national grid says, "Drax cannot be used for the next hour, or until the sea water is cleaned off the screens. We shall use the next cheapest power station that we have in reserve and bring it on line". Will that happen in the future? It would happen if the Government agreed to making the national grid the wholesaler. But under the new system National Power will have the obligation to bring its next cheapest power station on line, and that power station may not be the cheapest power station that is off line and waiting in reserve.

We are given to understand by electricity industry experts that that could mean an additional cost of £200 million a year to the consumer, all because the contracting generator will have the obligation to provide the next best power station that he has available rather than the national grid's being able to use the lowest unit cost alternative generator in the event of a major generating station or major transmission line breakdown. The Government should seriously think about the penalty to the consumer of not allowing the national grid to buy and sell power but merely allowing it to act as an inert and passive common carrier.

The national grid should also carry the obligation to supply. It makes no sense for the area boards to have the obligation to supply to the consumer. The national grid will be a plc owned by the 12 area boards, but it will nevertheless be an entirely separate operation. If it had the obligation to supply, major savings to the consumer would accrue.

Look at the lawyers' paradise that will be created by placing the obligation to supply on the area boards. Suppose that a major customer—say the steel industry in Yorkshire—finds that as a result of a voltage fault its steel is solidifying in its electric arc furnaces. The problem has nothing to do with the industry, which may have provided all the necessary contracts and a 10 per cent. margin over and above the highest winter demand. A generating or national grid fault may result in a sudden loss of power sufficient to wreck the induction furnaces or electric arc furnaces. The customer sues the area board; he cannot sue anyone else. The area board then has to sue the national grid or the generating board for the failure. Two or possibly more legal actions could be taking place at the same time.

If the national grid had the obligation to supply, that would simplify the whole system because it would have the obligation to provide the power, the alternatives to the power and the insurance on the alternatives through the national grid system.

The Under-Secretary of State has already referred today to the fact that his aim in life is to stop decisions being made behind what he called the "baize doors" in Whitehall and to have them made in the market place. I imagine that he does not want to see all the decisions being made in the High Court. However, he has devised a system that will undoubtedly prove to be a lawyers' paradise. In our opinion, these problems will have to be solved in another place, if not in this place.

The national grid is the right body to have the obligation to supply, and it is the right body to have the obligation to buy and sell power at the minimum unit cost to the consumer.

8.30 pm

I turn now to the contract system that will be devised around which the national grid will have to operate and which refers to the area boards, as does amendment No. 223. The Government's rhetoric says that an area board will have the right to place a contract with a generating station that can provide it with the cheapest power. The south Wales area board will in future buy from whichever is the cheapest station, which could be Aberthaw, its local big station. Yorkshire will buy from Drax and the East Midlands will buy from High Marnham or Ratcliffe-on-Soar, and the southern area boards will buy mainly nuclear, with a bit of oil and a bit of Didcot or whatever coal-fired power stations are nearby. We can see the problem immediately. A southern area board does not have cheap fossil fuel nearby. The South Western area board has only nuclear power nearby at Didcot, Aberthaw and at Fawley, on the fringes. Therefore, the power is much more expensive than is the power for the area boards in south Wales or in the north.

What is the Government's solution? Is it the free market? I was going to use a non-parliamentary expression to answer that, but I shall not. It certainly is not the free market. It is a "Sir Humphrey" solution. The Government have devised the nuclear quota by which the South Western area board will buy, say, 15 or 20 per cent. of its power from nuclear sources instead of the 80 or 90 per cent. that one might have expected. Once one has allocated for the nuclear quota around the 12 area boards, those area boards can have a maximum of only 80 per cent. fossil power. The southern area boards must then buy fossil fuel long distance, a little bit from Didcot obviously, but mostly from Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.

When that is replicated over the country, it has to be spread out so that the 12 area boards will be doing something remarkably like what they do today. Once one has redistributed the 15 to 20 per cent. nuclear quota around the 12 area boards, one must then redistribute around the 12 area boards the 80 or 85 per cent. fossil quota. Because of the nuclear quota, one cannot have a wonderful system of local identification between south Wales and Aberthaw, Yorkshire and Drax, and East Midlands and Ratcliffe-on-Soar. Therefore, there will not be any way of minimising one's transmission costs and identifying with the local generating station or of being able to get some real buzz in the business whereby everybody realises, "If we produce cheaper power, it will be good for our local industries" or anything like that because this is a "Sir Humphrey", a "Mad Hatter's tea party" system.

Finally, I remind the Minister that the new system of contracts is supposed to be operational by 1 October in shadow form and be in its full commercial form by 1 January 1990. The Minister already knows that that cannot be done either by 1 October or by 1 January next year, except in some attenuated, "weak tea" transitional form which is remarkably like the present bulk supply tariff system. The Minister will not admit it, but he knows

that that is what the area board chairmen are saying and that that is what those who are trying to devise the computer programme that will supply the despatch system and the settlement system for the contracts are saying. I am fairly sure that his own more local advisers are telling him, "If you want it by 1 January, you can have it, but it will look very much like the present system. If you want what it says in the rhetoric of the speech that you gave at last year's Tory party conference and more importantly what you want to say in the one that you hope to give at the next two Tory party conferences, you won't get it by 1 January." I hope that the Minister will be politically mature enough to admit that tonight.

Mr. Hardy: I shall be relatively brief because my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) has already put forward exceedingly powerful arguments. Unfortunately, our experience of the Bill does not give us cause for great optimism that the Minister will respond to his entirely sensible views.

The Government are confused. The Minister dare not retreat from the market force attachment, or the medals from the Adam Smith Institute to which my hon. Friend referred will be at risk. However, the fact is that the Minister is in a preposterous position. He has said that the Government will retain the best elements of the merit order system. The best element—the only element—of the merit order system is that the consumer obtains the cheapest possible available electricity. If the Minister departs from that principle, he cannot retain elements of it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West spelt out in detail that if National Power's cheap power station goes off line, it will not be the next cheapest power station that will supply the supplier with electricity; it will be National Power's next cheapest or perhaps its next nomination. That is not satisfactory. Rather than act with good sense and serve the consumer well, the Government have clung to their dogma.

I cannot see any sensible reason why the national grid should not remain in public hands or as an impartial wholesaler. An impartial wholesaler could act with good sense to ensure that there is encouragement for proper, sensible and wise developments in electricity generation. It could deter the insidious trader who may well be eagerly cheering the Government in their preposterous position. An impartial wholesaler could discourage those who are more concerned with financial massaging and manipulation than about the generation of electricity. People who can see through this muddled hotch potch see an opportunity for profit from the "take or pay" principle.

I do not suppose that any words from Opposition Members will persuade the Minister that good sense is necessary, but they should at least be on the record and that is why I am making this brief speech. I want to make it clear that on 10 April 1989 when the Bill was in its final stages there were those who said that the national interest suggested that a different arrangement would be sensible.

The Government are putting an enormous obligation on the director general. When one looks at the relatively meagre resources that the director general and the regulator will enjoy, one can see that it may later be regretted that the national grid was not given a more powerful and independent role in the industry. If the national grid were to remain in the role that we have been urging, the job of the regulator would be more effective.

As I have said, we cannot expect the Minister to accept our suggestions, because he will not have been given permission to do so before the Secretary of State flew off to Red Square. However, at least the Minister should explain to the House the elements of the merit order system that he will retain. We need to know that. I also want to know what steps he will take to ensure that the national grid has a capacity to apply a little wisdom in differentiating between the nearly crooked and the commendable in terms of generation development.

Finally—I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will appreciate this brief point—while we are talking about transmission, does the Minister recognise that Yorkshire consumers, and perhaps east midlands consumers also, have, because of their acceptance of the national interest, borne the fact that they have been subsidising some of the wealthier areas of this country because they have been paying rather more for their electricity than they would have done if they had not been contributing to the loss in transmission of a significant amount of electricity?

Once we have gone to market forces—once the market force application, and so on, imbues the whole electricity industry, as the Government intend—what concession, what assistance, what recognition of past sacrifice will be afforded to the consumers, certainly the consumers of the Yorkshire area? I do not believe that the Government, having decided to pursue the course of selfishness, could then turn round and say to the Yorkshire electricity consumers, "You will carry on exactly as you have been doing." If they do, we will take a rather more serious and rather more caustic view.

I hope that the Minister will be able to answer those questions. In particular, I implore him to explain to me how he can retain anything like the merit order system in the muddled and foolish confusion that the Government have created by this route.

Dr. Kim Howells: How does the Minister think the grid will offer choice for the consumer? It will be one grid, after all, and, with the best will in the world—I am trying to be as generous as possible to the Minister, because I know that he has a very difficult task to explain this—there will be a national grid company. Consider Sunday lunch time. Will we plug in to "On the Record" from PowerGen, and, when we decide to cook the Sunday lunch, will we plug in to National Power? Of course not. Will we watch "The Big Match" via ICI's sales to the grid? Of course not. It will be a national grid company, controlled by the area boards, that controls prices. It will, of course, be a cartel manifested in a single company. As our industry becomes more and more dependent upon electricity—and it will —we will find that this most vital of supply grids is controlled by the very people who are selling the stuff. They will do as I imagine all commercial companies do —try to get from the British public the highest possible profit. Of course, they will favour long-term "sweetheart" agreements with generating companies.

Mr. Hardy: The French.

Dr. Howells: Of course they will be looking to the French. Incidentally, I hope that the next time there is a strong wind from the Channel—one that does not originate in this House—the Minister will not allow the French suppliers to switch off the juice before the wind hits

[Dr. Howells]

Britain. I hope that we will not be stuck trying to find 2,000 MW in the south of England because the French have decided to protect their own supplies.

The companies will favour comfortable long-term "sweetheart" agreements with generating companies. It will not be competition. It will not be a question of looking around for generators that are ready to supply the cheapest electricity. It will be a series of private monopolies. They will be looking for trouble-free supplies —and so they should—but there are so many inconsistencies in this Bill, and we will be so increasingly dependent upon electricity, that they will have to look around for trouble-free supplies and "sweetheart" agreements.

But what about price? What will happen to price? We will have a series of cartels and a company that is a mouthpiece for those cartels, and prices will be increased so that profit levels may be cranked up as much as possible.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): I have been following very carefully the hon. Member's arguments and those of his colleagues. Can the hon. Member explain what motive there could possibly be for the new area boards and distribution companies not to shop around through the grid for the cheapest possible supply, but to do as he suggests—up the price? Surely the whole purpose of the structure that the Government propose is to give the new distribution companies the opportunity to buy in from the cheapest possible sources. What motive could they possibly have for doing otherwise?

8.45 pm

Dr. Howells: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. It is a good one because it affords me the opportunity to say that I believe that this Bill will allow the distribution companies to acquire power stations and, thereby, begin to control the local areas, not just in terms of the sale of electricity but in terms of its generation. It seems to me that in those circumstances the customer will be in very big trouble indeed. There will no longer be a chance to regulate supplies and costs. What we will have is an enfranchised monopoly, a private monopoly, over which we, as representatives of the customers in those areas, will have no control.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) opened his speech by saying that we had kept the grid neither in the public sector nor fully in the private sector. He made that point as a matter of criticism of the Government. Another way of looking at it is through our eyes. We have given the industry the benefits of privatisation—for instance, employee involvement in shares, Companies Act accounts, and motivation to efficiency. That is why we cannot accept amendment No. 161, which would result in the grids being kept in the public sector.

Mr. Morgan: The Minister says that employees will be given shares. In the national grid?

Mr. Michael Spicer: There will be arrangements whereby employees of the grid company will be able to own shares in the industry. That will, of course, motivate them in the way that I have suggested—something that would be denied to them by the Labour party and, in particular, by this amendment.

On the other hand, we have provided for the benefits that undoubtedly accrue from an integrated network. The Opposition—this is a new one; as a matter of fact, it is one of the first new things to have come up tonight—apparently want us to provide for a market-making capacity, a monopolistic buying capacity. The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) was particularly enthused about that. On the other hand, we are concerned to allow the grid company to be a common carrier. That is quite specifically what we wish it to be because it is central to our concept of competition amongst generators.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West asked—I think he was asking, though perhaps he was just making a statement; in any case, I took it to be some sort of question —whether or not, and how, we would be retaining any aspects of the merit order despatch arrangement. Certainly the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) raised this question. Quite manifestly, the answer is yes, and it will be done on the basis of bid prices into the generator pool. Of course, that will be done regardless of who owns the station. It will be a matter of encouraging those who are able to come forward with the best bid prices to do so and, as a result—subject to the stability of the system which, of course, will remain the responsibility of an integrated network company—they will be able to sell their wares through the common carriage arrangements that the network will provide. We do not see that there will be any problem about this, other than in the minds of those who wish to see some sort of monopolistic situation being returned—in this case, through the operations of the grid company.That is precisely what the whole thrust of this Bill is aimed at avoiding.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West made a quite legitimate and proper point in saying that the non-fossil fuel obligation intervened and distorted, to an extent, the workings of this competitive regime to which I have alluded. We have never, in any way or at any point, disguised from the House, or from anybody else, the fact that the non-fossil fuel obligation is, of course, a distortion in the market place. We hope that that distortion will be temporary as the nuclear levy becomes unnecessary. On many occasions we have told the House why we wish to have part of the electricity in this country provided by nuclear power, and I do not intend to weary the House by going over the argument again. The reason why we want a nuclear industry is fully on the record. On that basis I defend the undoubted distortion which will exist in a minor way under the competitive regime that we are presenting to the House. There is no way that we wish to accept the amendments and on that fair, cogent exposition I hope that the hon. Gentleman will feel able to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Morgan: I shall respond in like manner. The Minister is slightly wrong: regardless of his exposition I shall withdraw the amendment in the hope, possibly a vain one, that the other place will attend to these matters with its greater ability to think independently.

The Minister's reference to preserving the best aspects of the merit order system under the new contract system is phoney. Mr. Montague of Linklaters and Paines, one of

the leading solicitors firms in the City that are looking into this on behalf of the industry or the Government—I forget which—is one of many who has said:

"Profit is likely to be included in capacity charges rather than energy charges."

Mr. Montague said that at *The Economist* conference on electricity privatisation before Christmas. In other words, before any generator submits his generating station into the merit order pool, he has already made his money in the contract simply by being there. In that case there is no incentive for him to reduce his unit cost or for the national grid to buy from his generator because its unit cost is low.

Although we fully maintain our arguments and strongly reject the Government's arguments, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 61

Transfer of property etc. of Generating Board and Electricity Council

Mr. Lang: I beg to move amendment No. 66, in page 45, line 44, after 'including', insert

'rights to receive any sums by way of repayment supplement and'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment Nos. 87 and 88.

Mr. Lang: Amendment No. 66 is a technical amendment. Its purpose is to ensure that any repayments of corporation tax which might turn out to be overpaid would also be accompanied by repayment supplement due as a result of those repayments.

Amendment No. 88 is a technical amendment to remove any doubt on the effect of paragraph 8 of schedule 11 which was inserted in Committee. It is designed to ensure that tax allowances transferred from one company to another can be utilised by the second company. Amendment No. 87 is a drafting amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 10

Transfers under sections 61 and 62

Amendment made: No. 67, in page 108, line 1, leave out 'by' and insert 'in pursuance of'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 73

Treasury guarantees for loans made to the Scottish companies

Amendment made: No. 68, in page 52, line 32, leave out 'in Scotland'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 75

Financial limits on borrowings etc.

Amendments made: No. 69, in page 54, line 25, after 'of' insert '(a)'.

No. 70, in page 54, line 26, leave out from 'Wales' to end of line 28 and insert

'and

(b) sums issued under section 73 above in fulfilment of guarantees given in respect of loans made to such companies,

shall not exceed £2,000 million.'.

No. 71, in page 54, line 32, leave out

'in fulfilment of guarantees under section 73 above'

and insert

'under section 73 above in fulfilment of guarantees given in respect of loans made to successor companies in Scotland'.

No. 72 in page 54, line 34, leave out subsection (3).—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Clause 76

Responsibility for composite listing particulars

Mr. Michael Spicer: I beg to move amendment No. 73, in page 54, line 37, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert—

'.—(1) Where—

(a) the same document contains listing particulars for securities of two or more successor companies; and

(b) any person's responsibility for any information included in the document is stated in the document to be confined to its inclusion as part of the listing particulars for securities of any one of those companies,

that person shall not be treated as responsible for that information in so far as it is stated in the document to form part of the listing particulars for securities of any other of those companies.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government amendment No. 74.

Mr. Spicer: These are two technical amendments. They are designed to ensure that stock exchange rules are complied with in the drafting of prospectuses.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 74, in page 55, leave out lines 14 to 17 and insert—

'"responsible" means responsible for the purposes of Part IV of the 1986 Act and "responsibility" shall be construed accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicerr.]*

Schedule 11

Taxation provisions

Amendments made: No. 87, in page 111, line 37, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

No. 88, in page 112, line 6, at end insert—

'(5A) The trade carried on by a company whose liabilities are extinguished by virtue of section 74(1) of this Act shall, if the company's tax losses are aggregated and apportioned by virtue of sub-paragraph (2) above, be treated for the purposes of giving any relief under the Corporation Tax Acts in respect of the losses so apportioned as being, and having at all times been, the trade carried on by the successor companies to which the losses are apportioned.'.—*[Mr. Lang.]*

Clause 89

Directions for preserving security of electricity supplies etc

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I beg to move amendment No. 173, in page 60, line 39, at end insert—

'((2)) (1) The Secretary of State shall lay before each House of Parliament additional directions for the purpose of—

(a) preserving the security of building or installations used for, or for purposes connected with, or arising from the generating of nuclear power;

(b) mitigating the effects of any civil emergency that may occur as a result of the generation of nuclear power or any matters connected with or arising from the generation of nuclear power.

(2) in setting the directions under ((2)) (1) above the Secretary of State shall consult with the relevant local

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

authority; with the corresponding health authority or board and with representatives of police, fire and ambulance services.

(3) "relevant local authority" in ((2)) (2) above means the local authority in whose area the building or installation is situated; the local authority through whose area radioactive material may be transported and the local authorities whose area is within 25 miles of the building or installation.

(4) personnel provided for the security of a building or installation under this subsection to prevent terrorist or other attack shall be the responsibility of the the Secretary of State and shall not be provided by firms providing private security services whether employed by the licence holder or any other body or person.'.

The amendment specifically relates to the issues of security and safety at nuclear installations following privatisation. That has been referred to in previous debates and is an important issue. The amendment addresses several specific points.

The first part of the amendment is concerned with the security of buildings and installations associated with the generation of nuclear power. It then deals with mitigating the effects of an emergency. It provides for the co-ordination of an emergency plan with the relevant local emergency services and the notification of local authorities within a 25-mile radius of the building or installation. The final part deals with the security services associated with protecting nuclear installations against terrorist attack and requires that the provision of such security shall be the responsibility of the Secretary of State and shall not be sub-contracted to private security firms.

United Kingdom provision for the security of installations and for nuclear emergencies is not nationally co-ordinated or agreed, or well publicised. Nor does it compare favourably with nuclear installations in other countries. The requirement on nuclear power station operators is concerned only with on-site security and an evacuation planning distance of 3·5 km. Clearly, that does not take account of the possible implications of a significant fall-out of radioactivity. I have been advised that the evacuation distance is 16 km in the United States, 20 km in Finland, 10 km in Germany and between 12 and 15 km in Sweden. Only Mexico operates a smaller radius than we do, at 3 km, and the British Government should not be particularly proud of being marginally better than Mexico.

The main problem is caused by the lack of overall guidelines. It is left to each individual installation. There is no general understanding among the emergency or neighbouring authorities of exactly what is required. I am advised that Somerset county council has taken steps to ensure that there is a well-publicised plan for emergency evacuation of its nuclear installations and that it is available to the public. That is a desirable example which could usefully become the basis for the norm. It has happened only because the county council has initiated such a proposal and because it has managed to secure the voluntary co-operation of the authorities at Hinkley Point. To be fair, they get a good deal of criticism. The fact that they have co-operated is welcome.

The amendment seeks to make it a statutory requirement for this type of plan to be in operation in every circumstance and to make specific proposals for the involvement of the relevant authorities.

It should go without saying not only that there should be a plan, but the emergency services, which are likely to be most immediately affected in the neighbourhood, should be consulted in the formulation of the plan and fully informed about what the plan is. The fact that that is not the case is a matter for considerable alarm and shows unjustified complacency. No matter how good we may feel the safety and performance record of British installations is, we cannot rule out human error and the fact that there could be an accident. Indeed, there have been sufficient minor incidents—fortunately, in most cases, minor—to make it clear that we must have much better provisions and contingency arrangements for preparing for the possibility of a major disaster.

I do not wish to detain the House longer than is necessary, because some of the arguments have been covered when discussing previous amendments. I believe, however, that the amendment is more specific than the previous ones and shows how we should deal with the problem.

9 pm

I make no secret of the fact that one reason why I have been a persistent and long-term critic of the nuclear power industry has been that, from the days of the previous Labour Government, it has been a requirement to provide armed police to guard nuclear power installations. That begins to bring into question civil liberties. Of course, I accept that those installations are targets for terrorism and need to be protected, but I believe that the House should consider how that protection will continue when the nuclear installations have been transferred to the private sector. That is not just idle speculation. A number of private security agencies are involved in the surveillance of people connected with or critical of the nuclear industry. It is a specific concern of mine that such a body as Zeus Security Consultants, now known as Securipol, could possibly be charged with actually carrying out the protection of those installations. If that were the case, it would effectively mean privatising not just a significant and important policing operation, but an armed policing operation. *[Interruption.]* The Government may want to privatise the police. However, I believe that we are in dangerous waters if we are suggesting that private nuclear power station operators should be free to contract with private security services to protect those installations. We could be faced with the possibility of a private company providing armed police and using security and surveillance methods that are more associated with counter-espionage than with normal policing operations.

It is no secret that this issue has been raised previously, but I do not apologise for mentioning it again. A couple of months ago my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and others tabled an early-day motion drawing attention to the involvement of Lord Chalfont in just one of those agencies. It remains the view of my right hon. Friend and my colleagues that being chairman of the Independent Broadcasting Authority is incompatible with being an active director of a company that carries out what I believe are rather unsavoury security and surveillance operations. Evidence—as recently as last week on Channel 4—has shown that the methods of operation of such companies are extremely dubious.

There have been a number of revelations in the House about our state security services and their failings, but the idea that we should be licensing and, indeed, providing a market for private organisations of this character to be able to develop and expand is unacceptable.

I hope that the Minister can assure us that the security of nuclear installations in the private sector will remain the responsibility of the Secretary of State. If any armed personnel are involved in the protection of those installations—which presumably will continue to be necessary, as that has been the case for at least the past 15 years—they should be employees of the state and not of any private organisation.

The amendment covers a number of different, although relevant and related matters. Do the Government propose to bring forward co-ordinated strategic plans for dealing with any emergency at a nuclear installation, dealing with appropriate evacuation procedures and informing the public and the relevant authorities, especially the emergency services and the local authorities?

If the Minister does not agree to the notification of a 25-mile radius, will he say what kind of evacuation radius the Government think appropriate and how far around it the relevant emergency services and authorities should be involved?

I am prepared to accept that the amendment is open to interpretation, but we need to know more than we have been able to discover so far from the Minister. We cannot simply allow the public to accept assurances from the industry—they will not accept them in any case—that we are much safer and better at operating nuclear power stations than are any of our competitors in any other countries and that we do not require further safety procedures. That is the current state of affairs.

Before the installations are transferred into the private sector we need a clearer statement on what the Government propose to do about emergency and evacuation procedures involving the relevant authorities. I hope the Minister can also give me an assurance that any armed security personnel involved at any nuclear installation will be directly accountable to the Secretary of State and through him to this House.

Mr. Hardy: Many of the security firms pay very poor wages and I am not suggesting that Lord Chalfont is subject to such wages. I have heard of people on £1·50 an hour—that is reason enough to suggest that Lord Chalfont is not included in that particular group. However, there are social dangers in giving people so little money. I am worried if such firms recruit people on a part-time, casual basis. It might be profitable for employers to leave us in a state of dependency on that sort of casual labour, but that is almost as questionable as some areas of the black economy that are causing concern. The Minister needs to give the House some assurances about that.

I know it is fashionable to talk about the modern bugging to which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) referred a moment ago. Such bugging may provide massive profits for technologically advanced security firms. I am chiefly concerned about the people who will run the security of privatised nuclear power stations, perhaps for many years to come. For us to be dependent on such outfits gives us cause for concern and may well create a nasty taste in the mouth.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The nuclear installations inspectorate, through its licensing powers under the Nuclear Installations (Amendment) Act 1965, already requires that nuclear generators draw up emergency plans to deal with any nuclear accidents in full consultation with the relevant local authorities and emergency services.

The lack of formal responsibility on local authorities to produce emergency plans for nuclear installations of the kind that exist under the Control of Industrial Major Accidents Hazards Regulations for hazardous chemical sites has been noted by my Department. It has been decided to deal with this by making use of powers available to the Health and Safety Commission and by placing a legal requirement on local authorities to prepare the kind of integrated off-site plans for licensed nuclear sites for which the hon. Gentleman has properly called.

The House may like to note that the intention is to go beyond the normal requirements for reference accidents, which is the basis for the existing CIMAH regulations. In the case of nuclear sites, the off-site plans will be required to address the availability of contingency plans to provide for a capability to deal with nuclear accidents which have more widespread effects than the detailed site and off-site plans are designed to cater for. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured on that point, to which his amendment is appropriately addressed. Legislative help is on the way regarding the integration of plans.

The power proposed in paragraph (1A) of the amendment is already covered by clause 89(1)(a) which enables the Secretary of State to give directions about the security of nuclear power stations. That is a recurring theme of my response to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). However, it would be quite inappropriate for the Secretary of State to undertake wide consultations on matters involving counter-terrorist measures because it would be impossible to preserve the confidentiality of the proposed measures. For that reason, the Secretary of State will have the discretion not to lay directions before Parliament if that would be against the interests of national security. The hon. Member for Gordon conceded the vital importance of preserving power stations from any potential attack by terrorists.

I shall turn to the point made by the hon. Member for Gordon—addressed by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)—that in his view, and this was mentioned in the amendment, there should be no role for private security companies. We cannot accept that. Security matters are the responsibility of those running the power stations, with the proviso that the Secretary of State has the capability to make directions. That fall-back exists throughout the clause; in fact the purpose of the clause is to give him ultimate responsibility to make directions. We do not see why it should not be possible for those with responsibility for security of power stations to use private security contractors should they wish to do so.

The hon. Member for Wentworth mentioned low wages. The headquarters of one of the largest security companies in the country—Group 4 Total Security—is in my constituency. Therefore, I am aware of the industry's structure, benefits and problems. However, I cannot give the assurances about low levels within the industry which he seemed to seek. Those are a matter for negotiation between the companies and their employees. However, I agree that it is extremely important to maintain the highest standards within those companies, particularly when vetting personnel.

Mr. Hardy: Does not the Minister recognise that if a security company seeks to behave responsibly, pay reasonable wages, vet and insure its employees properly and do all that a model employer should, it is likely to be outbid by a firm that sticks up notices—of the sort that I

[Mr. Hardy]

have seen in jobcentres—offering part-time employment for wretchedly low wages, has no capacity for the proper supervision of its workers, and does nothing more than bank its own large profits?

Mr. Spicer: If that is the case, such companies would be extremely short sighted, because they will put the security of their businesses at risk by employing cowboy operators of the kind suggested by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). Therefore, it is sensible for anyone employing contractors for security to ensure they employ those of the highest quality. No doubt, as a result, they will pay them properly for their services.

I concede the point made by the hon. Member for Wentworth that it is extremely important that companies should operate properly. However, we do not want to pass legislation to prevent nuclear power operators from using private contractors should they wish to do so. However, I stress the proviso that the Secretary of State retains—through the operations of the clause—powers of direction and therefore of ultimate responsibility for security.

On the basis of that explanation, I hope that the hon. Member for Gordon will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I am still worried about the Minister's failure to reply to one or two points. Those who are involved with or concerned about the safety of nuclear installations—local authorities, for example—are less than happy about the lack of a clear agreed national guideline, and they are still pressing the Department for one. I can genuinely understand—although I do not share this view—that the Government may believe that negotiating with the local authorities and emergency services and notifying the public who live near nuclear installations about evacuation and emergency procedures might create alarm. Against that, however, too many people who live near the installations have no idea of what they are supposed to do in an emergency and no chance of finding out if there is one. Given that a major disaster occurred a few years ago—admittedly, and for this we are grateful, not in this country—I believe that the public would prefer the Government to be more honest and to encourage more discussion of this matter. They would regard it as a greater reassurance——

9.15 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: The hon. Gentleman is right to pull me up for not answering the point about the 3 km evacuation areas. That distance is not a hard and fast standard. The authorities frequently engage in much wider areas for evacuation exercises. I have taken part in an exercise that covered a much wider area. I can offer the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful for that assurance. Although I specifically referred to the involvement of local services in an area up to 25 miles away, that is not the point at issue. I accept that there may be reasons for variations in all sorts of circumstances. The lack of a national agreed scheme, however, gives rise to concern. Each installation must make its own plans; those plans are variable, and I am less and less convinced from the evidence made available to me that they are all good and that local authorities and the people living in these areas are adequately informed and involved in the planning process.

I do not want to tempt providence, but if there were a serious accident in a British nuclear installation, the Government would be found wanting for not having ensured that enough information was given to the public who live in these areas.

The final point to which the Minister did not respond was my request for an assurance that any armed surveillance that might be required in these installations would be carried out by personnel who were accountable to the Secretary of State. Personal preferences apart, I can accept a legitimate role for private security companies in the security of nuclear installations, but I cannot readily accept the deployment of armed personnel who work in the private sector. It is most unfortunate that the Minister could not give me the assurance that I sought.

I cannot claim to be particularly happy with the Minister's response. If he cannot give me any firmer assurances, I shall withdraw the amendment, but only on the understanding that the issue will be raised again in another place——

Mr. Michael Spicer: I understand—if I am wrong, I shall publicly correct myself—that at present only the Atomic Energy Authority police in nuclear installations have the right to carry arms. That right was given them by legislation and will not apply to private companies.

Mr. Bruce: That was a helpful intervention and I shall not pursue the point further. I have made my point forcefully and clearly. I still believe that the Government should do more, and this matter will come up again in another place. In the meantime, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 12

Nuclear Liabilities: Financial Assistance

Mr. Alan W. Williams: I beg to move amendment No. 162, in page 113, line 19 at end insert—

'(4) There shall be no grants payable under this Schedule save for expenditure in respect of extra costs that could not have been foreseen by the person concerned as at the date the Act takes effect.'.

Schedule 12 allows the Secretary of State to make grants or loans to the privatised industry for reprocessing nuclear waste, for storage or disposal of waste or for decommissioning nuclear power stations. The schedule seems to be open-ended in that all the bills for waste and decommissioning could be passed to the Government by the privatised industry. The critical phrase in the amendment is

"extra costs that could not have been foreseen by the person concerned"

We are talking about grants and loans up to £2·5 billion and those could be renewed by order up to £1 billion at a time. We know that the costs at the end of the nuclear cycle could be quite heavy. The CEGB has reserves of about £3 billion set aside to meet those costs. The thermal oxide reprocessing plant project will cost £1·5 billion and the decommissioning cost for British Nuclear Fuels installations is about £4·5 billion. That has increased tenfold in the past year.

The decommissioning costs of nuclear power stations are guesswork at the moment. The Government's guess of the cost is about £300 million. This year is the 10th anniversary of the disaster at Three Mile Island and

already over $1 billion have been spent trying to clean up that mess. The £300 million that I have mentioned is a minimum figure, but the true cost could be as high as £2 billion per nuclear reactor. There are nine Magnox reactors and seven advanced gas-cooled reactors. That means that 16 nuclear power stations have to be decommissioned. The minimum bill for that is £5 billion, but it could be as high as £30 billion.

The cost of disposing of waste is also the subject of guesswork. We do not know the cost of disposing of intermediate-level waste, and the technologies for disposing of high-level waste have not yet been developed. In Committee we talked about a figure of £4 billion, but the Government did not provide any figure.

As I have said, it is clear that the schedule is open ended and all the bills could be passed to the taxpayer. We could have the intolerable situation of the privatised industry being allowed to make a profit and passing the big bills at the end of the nuclear cycle to the taxpayer. In Committee the Minister told us that the provisions referred to unforeseen costs. I have gone minutely through the schedule and can find no mention of unforeseen costs.

The Government need to specify exactly what costs they expect at the end of the cycle. They should specify the foreseen costs and the unforeseen costs. That should be done in the interests of would-be shareholders in the privatised industry and in the interests of taxpayers, the electorate, whose industry is being privatised.

We know that there is terrific concern about these issues in the City and the industry. In a newspaper article a month ago, it was pointed out that the electricity sell-off could flop over the nuclear waste issue. The article said that John Bates, the managing director-designate of National Power, which will have responsibility for nuclear power, had suggested that a public chest should be set up to carry the costs of decommissioning. The CBI is so concerned about the problems at the back end of the cycle that it does not want nuclear power to be privatised.

The purpose of our amendment is to make the Government pin down what costs will be covered by the schedule. We feel that it would be only costs that are not foreseen by the directors of the privatised industry. That was the spirit of the discussion that we had in Committee, and we are asking the Government to put into words the spirit of their reply in Committee. The Government cannot but accept the amendment. They gave us the message that the schedule was meant to cover unforeseen costs. Therefore, not only my hon. Friends but the Government must accept the amendment.

Mr. Hardy: I shall not make a long speech, although this is a serious matter. It is a pity that only two Conservative Back Benchers are here to listen to the essential contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). I shall repeat a little more briefly the arguments that I advanced in Committee. Conservative Members do not seem to understand that change is accelerating. For example, in the last decade we have seen an intensification of terror in many parts of the world. In the past 15 years, the arrangements and procedures of this building have changed dramatically in response to terror and violence. In 1979, violent crime reached its then highest recorded level. In the decade since then, although the Government have made combating crime their priority, that level has at least doubled.

With this acceleration, with all the other problems that we face, with the sheer encouragement of greed and the infliction of hopelessness on young people—in this country and in others—how a sensible Government can embark on a 100-year policy with an overwhelming commitment to greed and private ownership, a diminution of state responsibility and disregard of the realities of change, I do not know. In due course, our generation will be accused of having taken leave of its senses. I am pleased that some Conservative Members are here for the debate, but it is of such an enormous and historic dimension that this matter should be debated more fully and freely rather than being witnessed by a few silent Members.

My hon. Friend has done us a great service. He has pointed to the economic realities, but the Government should consider the social realities as well. They should ask whether the growing levels of inflation and the increasing gravity of our economic condition make it possible for us to enter into a 100-year agreement. We may find ourselves unable to afford that agreement in less than half that time.

9.30 pm

Dr. Kim Howells: There are many unknowns about decommissioning, such as those of technology. Another unknown is insurance. I understand that £20 million is talked about for that, but that is infinitesimal in terms of the effect on a community which experiences any signs of nuclear activity. Near my constituency a pressurised water reactor is to be built at Hinkley Point. If something happens at Hinkley Point, we shall be in big trouble economically and domestically. Besides the fact that we shall all have to run for it, such an incident will have a dreadful effect upon the local economy. Who will pay for that?

One of the most critical moments in the life of any reactor—this is the result of any analysis—is when it becomes decommissioned. That is the moment when we start moving radioactive material from a controlled point, from a nuclear reactor. We have all seen the glossy publications that have been produced by the CEGB, which set out the three stages of nuclear decommissioning. The drawings of the first stage show a nuclear station. In the second set of drawings there are fewer buildings around the nuclear station. In the third stage, pictures are drawn of cows grazing on the site of the former nuclear reactor. That is nonsense.

As I understand it, we are talking of a time scale of between 100 and 500 years. I am assuming that cows will still be supplying our milk 500 years on. There is no talk, however, of economics. What happens if there is even a minor accident at a nuclear station during the decommissioning process? My hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) has drawn attention to the article which appeared in the colour magazine of *The Observer* on Sunday. It informed us that the decommissioning or rescue process for Three Mile Island has already cost four times the amount that it cost to construct. Who will pay when it comes to an accident? Will it be the Government or the private owner of the nuclear power station? I will tell the House who will pay. The Government will pay in the end, which means that the customer will pay. The Government are ghettoising the nuclear sector. They are trying to pretend that it will become part of a great new privatised industry. In fact, they are ringfencing it. If anything goes wrong, the public

[Dr. Kim Howells]

will have to pick up the tab, and it will be a considerable tab. The damage to the economy will be irreversible in any area where something goes wrong.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Does the hon. Member agree that under the present system, in which everything is nationalised, all decommissioning costs will automatically be picked up by the public? Within the system are stations that were ordered by the Labour Government.

Dr. Howells: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It allows me to say that if there is a benefit to be derived from the nuclear generation of electricity, as the Government say there is, we pick up the profit. However, if something goes wrong in future, we shall not pick up a profit. In addition, we shall have to pay for the damage. Where is the sense in that? I hope that the Minister will be comprehensive in his reply.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It seems that the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) does not like the 100-year idea. He thinks that it is a long time.

Mr. Hardy: I do not like it within a privatised context.

Mr. Spicer: In any event, the hon. Gentleman does not like the 100-year idea.

Were the third stage of decommissioning to be changed by regulation in such a way that meant that it could not be anticipated, that would be cause for public expenditures to be incurred. We had a long debate in Committee on this issue, during which we made clear our policy. We do not think it necessary to put into the Bill the provision that has been suggested by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). That would be unnecessary. It would provide a tremendous bonanza for lawyers. Everyone would come forward to argue that a particular proposal did not fit within the legislation. We are clear about the policy. The industry, and therefore the consumer, will pay for decommissioning unless something happens that was not capable of being foreseen—such as the regulations concerning the environment being changed—and proper provision could not therefore have been made in the accounts.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) had some fun at the end of his speech about who pays. Either the taxpayer or the consumer pays. We make no bones about the fact that the consumer will pay for decommissioning and it is correct that he should. He will pay in the way that is appropriate, through proper provisions in the accounts and with the appropriate charging being made against those provisions.

In answer to the comment made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans), the hon. Member for Pontypridd was less than fair in saying that the shareholder would benefit from the industry's profits but the taxpayer would pick up the costs. Because we do not want that to persist, we are making it clear that the schedule will be activated only if there is a change in environmental policies that the industry could not have foreseen. To overcome the reservations that the hon. Gentleman put to the House, I give the assurance that we shall use these powers for England and Wales where the environmental conditions and regulations are changed.

I hope that the hon. Member for Carmarthen will not feel it necessary to press the amendment. I give him the assurance that that is the Government's policy and we intend to stick to it.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Where is it said in the schedule that the measure will be activated only in unforeseen circumstances? I understand from my reading of the Bill that the schedule can be activated at any stage by any Secretary of State whenever the industry asks for the money, and in that way it could be used to pay for the whole thing.

Mr. Spicer: I am setting out the Government's policy. The Government would not activate the schedule unless there were unforeseen changes. Therefore, the hon. Gentleman's amendment is not necessary.

Mr. Morgan: The Under-Secretary of State asked my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) not to press the amendment to the vote. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will press it.

We are reaching the closing stages of the Report stage and we are still wondering about its purpose. It is not to keep hon. Members from their dinners. It is certainly not to keep the Secretary of State from his—nothing keeps him from his dinner, either here or in Moscow. All of us who have had to work through the Committee and Report stages are interested in what the Government mean when they give an undertaking in Committee. Do they meet it on Report?

We have tabled amendment No. 162 in precise words to meet the exact requirements set out in Committee by the Under-Secretary of State. We originally tabled an amendment which included the word "foreseeable", but the hon. Gentleman said that he was not happy with it and that it was a little unfair, but he thought that the word "foreseen" was fair. We took out the word "foreseeable" and inserted "foreseen".

The Under-Secretary of State had another objection in Committee. He said that the amendment was not precise in terms of who would be covered by it. We made it precise and inserted "by the person concerned", which is legal language for National Power, the successor company to the nuclear part of the CEGB.

If a Report stage means anything, and if the word of a Minister in Committee means anything, I hope that the Minister will say that amendment No. 162 is satisfactory. However, from his remarks, I understand that he will not take that view. I do not know what that says about the Minister's attitude to undertakings he has given. What does he think is the purpose of Report, and does he realise that this Chamber is a Parliament of the British people?

If the Minister does not agree to the amendment, it means that, having put on a little show of bravado in Committee, he is now saying that he wants some form of riskless private capitalism because one cannot privatise the industry with the nuclear component intact on any other terms. What other industry would have the cheek to ask for all of its unforeseen risks to be covered by the taxpayer? What other industry would say that, although it has capital and reserves, they must not be touched if one of its major waste processors should suddenly increase its charges? Can the Minister name any other industry that exists in the private sector on the terms that if it has any problems with waste disposal the Government will ensure that the share capital owners and the people who have

gone in for great risk taking in equity investment or the excitement of buying shares will have no problems because the taxpayer will pick up the tab?

There is another peculiar aspect, similar to the peculiarity of the nuclear levy. The Government have said that it is wise to have insurance against the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries or another miners' strike. The Government say that the insurance of a second source of fuel is needed as cover against any sudden eventualities and that that makes sense. But what other industry can the Minister name which has instructions to spend more than £6 billion on a second source of fuel to cover it against an eventuality such as the possibility of another OPEC monopoly trebling the price of oil or another miners' industrial dispute? Other industries believe that if one owns shares, those shares and reserves are at risk to cover eventualities such as that. The merchant bankers have told the Government that they must realise that they cannot sell nuclear power on such terms. They have also told them that, knowing the problems of waste disposal with nuclear power, there is no possibility of selling the industry with its nuclear power component intact because the risks are far too great.

For the past 30 years, the nuclear power industry has existed as a big lie. We were told in 1957 that it knew how to solve the problem of its nuclear waste disposal or that, if it did not know this year, it would know next year. Thirty years later, the industry still does not know how to dispose of its nuclear waste. At the Hinkley Point public inquiry the CEGB was asked how it would dispose of the spent fuel rods from Hinkley Point, but it could not give an answer—32 years after the beginning of civil nuclear power in this country.

The Government have the cheek to tell us that the nuclear power industry is clean relative to coal because it does not cause the problems of the greenhouse effect. The coal industry has serious environmental problems, but they are soluble. For the nuclear power industry, we have been waiting 32 years to find out what they are. The difference can be summarised as follows. When one installs an admittedly very expensive but known technology, which has been in use in Japan for more than 15 years, in which limestone scrubbers are put in the chimneys of coal-fired power stations, one produces a useful building product—plaster—for which there is an immediate sale. I cannot think of any comparable product in the nuclear industry. Nuclear waste has to be buried under the ground and the sites of old power stations have to be covered with hundreds of feet of concrete for more than 100 years. I shall summarise it briefly. The back end of the nuclear power fuel cycle gives us Nirex; the coal cycle gives us artex.

The real problem that is causing the Government to insist that the nuclear power station component remains alive is that the Prime Minister has a talismanic faith in the nuclear power industry. She wears her talisman around her neck. After General Galtieri there came Arthur Scargill and she believes that she conquered him. I am told that following a couple of Johnnie Walkers in the evening she sometimes believes that she won back the Falklands by dropping a nuclear power station on Buenos Aires.

The right hon. Lady's simple belief must be brought to an end. The economics of nuclear power have run their generational cycle and the time has come for us to return to a sensible policy to meet our energy and electricity requirements. The private sector has plainly told the Department of Energy that it will not undertake the risks of nuclear power, so poor old muggins, the taxpayer, will have to do the job again.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 191, Noes 249.

Division No. 150] **[9.45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie

Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Watts, John
Widdecombe, Ann

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 92

COMPETITION AND RESTRICTIVE TRADE PRACTICES

Mr. Morgan: I beg to move amendment No. 166, in page 62, line 39, leave out paragraph (b).

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments:

No. 163, in page 62, line 42, leave out subsection (3).

No. 167, in page 63, line 4, leave out paragraph (b).

No. 157, in schedule 13, page 115, line 21, leave out sub-paragraph (3).

Government amendments Nos. 91 and 75 to 78.

Mr. Morgan: This group of amendments relates, in the main, to restrictive trade practices. They raise the question of just how deeply the Government have thought about whether they have produced a competitive regime, and, if they have produced a competitive regime, whether it will be up to them to regulate it or whether it might be up to the European Community as well. Obviously, there is a fairly fluid boundary between the two jurisdictions on matters relating to competition. It certainly occurs to us, having read the comments made by bodies such as the CBI, that there may well be problems for the Government arising from the regulation, by the EEC, of some of the little peculiarities of this Bill. We are thinking particularly of the nuclear levy. Would the Government have a leg to stand on if someone challenged them on that at the European Court of Justice because they were in breach of article 85 by compelling people to buy more expensive power than they wanted? The CBI made that point and we entirely agree that the Government need to persuade us that if the large industries with the resources——

It being Ten o'clock, further consideration of the Bill stood adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Electricity Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

As amended, further considered.

Mr. Morgan: The CBI spoke of "the nuclear millstone". It wants to be free of that and the Government must address the matter. Consumers, particularly in the north and in south Wales, could well take the Government to the European Court and challenge them that the north subsidises the south on electricity prices and will do so even more under the Bill because of the increasing burden of the nuclear millstone. Have the Government thought about that?

We wonder how the Government will handle a proposed foreign takeover of any of the area boards or generating boards. Will not the EEC disallow the Government from keeping the essential sinews of the electricity industry, which we believe must remain in British hands? The water industry is in a similar position. If France or any other European country suddenly took a fancy to a British area board, as happened with the water boards, could the Government stop such a foreign takeover, given the strictures on restrictive trade in articles 85 and 92 of the treaty of Rome?

Mr. Michael Spicer: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have thought about the competitive regime implied in the Bill. That is, indeed, when we introduced the Bill. It will have a dramatic effect in ensuring competition in the industry in future.

The amendments seek to remove all exemptions to restrictive agreements. We cannot agree to that because there must be some such agreements. The industry could not exist without, for example, agreements on emergency planning or pooling arrangements.

We have had discussions with the Commission on the hon. Gentleman's question about the EEC. We have absolutely no reason to believe that there should be any problems. We are in the forefront of all European countries in providing a competitive regime for the electricity industry. We shall keep the EEC informed about any future developments. On that basis I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw his amendment and that the House will accept the Government amendments in this group.

Mr. Morgan: I shall accept the Government amendments, but not because we are satisfied with the Minister's reply.

In the EEC, if one calls something public infrastructure and treats it as such, one is allowed all manner of exclusions from the impact of articles 85 and 92. However, if one calls something a straight commercial business and says that one wishes to return all EEC loans because one wants to be on a complete commercial footing, as the Government do, one is in trouble. Therefore, many questions must be answered before we can be assured that the EEC will not find it necessary to interfere on a large scale with the industry. The Government have not thought this through.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 14

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 91, in page 117, line 32, leave out sub-paragraph (1)(iv).

No. 75, in page 128, leave out lines 11 to 14.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 15

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AND SAVINGS

Amendments made: No. 76, in page 129, line 22, leave out sub-paragraph (1) and insert—

'(1) Where any application made under section 2 of the Electric Lighting Act 1909 or section 35 of the Electricity (Scotland) Act 1979 is effective on the day appointed for the coming into force of section 33 of this Act—

(a) the application shall have effect as if made under the said section 33 modified for that purpose by the omission of subsections (2) and (2A);

(b) anything done before that day in relation to the application (whether under the said section 2 or 35 or under section 33 or 34 of the Electricity Act 1957) shall have effect as if done under the corresponding provisions of Schedule 8 to this Act, and

(c) the provisions of Part I of this Act shall apply accordingly.'.

No. 77, in page 129, line 43, leave out sub-paragraph (1) and insert—

'(1) Where any application made under section 10(b) of the Schedule to the Electric Lighting (Clauses) Act 1899 is effective on the day appointed for the coming into force of section 34 of this Act—

(a) the application shall have effect as if made under the said section 34 modified for that purpose by the omission of subsection (2);
(b) anything done before that day in relation to the application (whether under the said section 10(b) or under section 32 or 34 of the Electricity Act 1957) shall have effect as if done under the corresponding provisions of Schedule 8 to this Act; and
(c) the provisions of Part I of this Act shall apply accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Schedule 16

REPEALS

Amendment made: No. 78, in page 144, line 45, column 3, leave out lines 45 and 46 and insert 'Section 44.'.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

Order for Third Reading read—Queen's and Prince of Wales's consent signified.

10.6 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is probably impossible to present new considerations for the deliberations of the House that have not already been exhaustively discussed at Second Reading, in Committee or on Report. However, I would wish briefly, in order not to detain the House, to emphasise that the Government believe that the deliberations on the Bill have clearly and firmly established the basic propositions on which the Bill was originally commended to the House.

First, we believe that the Bill is in the interests of the electricity industry. It is significant that the industry agrees with our observation. Perhaps the most important consideration from the industry's point of view is that in future the investment needs and other crucial decisions affecting the electricity industry will not be subject to Government or to politicians of any party. That will place the electricity industry in the same position as other industries throughout the United Kingdom. It can only be beneficial that those aspects of investment and other matters are determined by the industry. I believe that that explains the enthusiasm of the people who work in the electricity industry for the prospects that privatisation will bring about.

Secondly, I believe that the Bill has clearly been shown to be in the interests of the consumer. That is central to the difference between the two sides of the House. Whereas the Labour party, and those who support its point of view, believe that if one cannot have perfect competition, one should be satisfied with perfect monopoly, the Government believe that it is possible to introduce substantial elements of competition within the electricity industry, that it is in the interests of the consumer to do so and that the Bill will bring that about.

There will, therefore, be competition in generation, there will be choice for bulk purchasers of electricity and there will be opportunities for exporters, especially for the Scottish electricity industry, which I believe have justified the support for the Bill.

The Bill is especially important for Scotland where the nationalisation of the electricity industry some 40 years ago meant—as do all other forms of nationalisation in Scotland—the loss of control in Scotland to the Government of the day, whichever Government that might be. One never ceases to be amused, as well as unsurprised, at the inability of the Opposition to understand that argument.

In future the needs of the Scottish electricity industry will be decided by the management of that industry in Scotland, which I believe is of significance. In addition, by the privatisation of the SSEB and the hydro board, we will create two of the largest Scottish companies, which will give a major boost to the development of the Scottish private sector. We will see also exciting opportunities for consumers, employees and financial institutions in Scotland to acquire a significant stake in the industry.

There are fundamental differences between the Government and the Opposition. The Opposition stand for monopoly. They stand for continuing monopoly that they express themselves content with and anxious to preserve. The Opposition also appear to believe that there is a need not for simply a regulatory structure to protect the public interest, but for politicians and for Governments to have a continuing right to interfere in the fundamental decisions affecting this industry, although they have no comparable right in other industries that are crucial to our national economy.

These are crucial issues of principle and I believe that during the debate my right hon. and hon. Friends, who have been concerned with the detail of the Bill, have manifestly shown the desirability of the Bill and, indeed, the benefits that it will bring to the public throughout the United Kingdom. It is on that basis that I happily commend the Bill to the House.

10.8 pm

Mr. Blair: As we are preparing to vote on the Third Reading of the Electricity Bill it is instructive to remember the words of the Secretary of State for Industry who, six years ago, moved the Telecommunications Bill to privatise British Telecom. The Secretary of State for Industry then is the Secretary of State for Energy now, the peripatetic right hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson). I gather he is now occupied as a travelling salesman somewhere in the Soviet Union. At that time he set up what he believed would be the guiding principle in the privatisation of British Telecom. He promised:

"It will give customers the choice between different suppliers of apparatus, different suppliers of services and, increasingly, different networks."

It did not do any of those things. He said of British Telecom:

"I am convinced that to change British Telecom ownership will bring about a major improvement in BT's accountability."

It has not. Finally, he said:

"We offer the millions of BT customers a newly enshrined set of rights"—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1983; Vol. 46, c. 27-38.]

Tell that to the thousands more who, each year, complain about the standards of service that they receive.

The truth is that every promise that has been made tonight for the Electricity Bill was made in 1983 for the British Telecom Bill. The Government were wrong then and they are wrong now. We have established that for the consumer, contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman has said, there will be no choice of area board, no choice at point of service. There will be little competition ever in this industry and no competition for at least 10 years.

We have shown that the basic security of supply is at risk because, as Mr. Baker said and the Secretary of State

could not deny, it will not be the duty of National Power or PowerGen to keep the lights on after privatisation, although they are the only people who will be able to fulfill that duty of supply.

We have learnt that the area boards with a high proportion of industrial customers will be vulnerable to takeover and bankruptcy if they lose major customers from the system.

We have revealed that the nuclear industry, quite apart from any other section of the fuel industry, will be ring fenced, given special protection against risk and underwritten by a special tax paid for by the consumer and the taxpayer who will still be liable for the costs of decommissioning even after losing the profit from the industry.

We know that the national grid, the transmission system, itself a monopoly to be owned by the area boards, will be privatised although no rational case has been made for its privatisation at any time during our deliberations.

We have exposed the fact that the costs of flotation will be huge and that they may amount to as much as £25 for every household in this country. All that for a privatisation that the people do not want, the nation does not need and that is now incomprehensible in any terms except as a doctrine driven by prejudice.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is not the Government's whole stance in relation to this Bill reminiscent of Oscar Wilde who said, after the first night of one of his plays, "The play is a great success, but the audience a failure"? Although the Government are convinced by their own propaganda, has not the Bill been overwhelmingly rejected by the electorate and therefore by the consumers?

Mr. Blair: My right hon. Friend is entirely right.

The Government may get their majority tonight in the House, but they have failed miserably to persuade the majority of people in this country that the proposal is good. At the next election they shall pay the penalty for that misjudgment.

10.13 pm

Mr. Rost: I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the courageous manner in which they have introduced this radical Bill and on the skilful manner in which they have handled this complicated and technical reform.

I welcome the opportunity for competition. Evidence already exists of area boards shopping around and contracting or arranging to contract for cheaper electricity than they now pay the CEGB to supply. The east midlands board, for example, is already offered cheaper power than it now buys from the CEGB. I welcome the change of heart on the part of the CEGB, which is already having to rethink its energy strategy and abandon its traditional plans of electricity only large coal-fired stations in favour of lower-cost electricity production. It has had to turn to combined cycle gas turbines and it has realised that, in future, it will have to sell electricity in a competitive market.

I welcome the nuclear clause because for the first time, by ring fencing the real cost of nuclear energy, it will concentrate the minds of the nuclear industry, which will have to become competitive if it wishes to have a future unprotected by a subsidy which I regard as transitional. I welcome the effect that it will have on the coal industry, which will also have to realise that it must improve its competitiveness if it wishes to sell its products. The country will no longer be handicapped by high-cost coal and the high-cost electricity which results from it.

I welcome the opportunities of wider share ownership, particularly employees shareholding, that will result from the legislation. I welcome the opportunities that will come to the new technologies for electricity production, which the CEGB has preferred to ignore and which will produce cheaper power—the clean coal technologies, the combined-cycle gas turbine. Those will exert downward pressure on prices, as distributors have the competitive incentive to source their supplies from lower-cost electricity. I welcome the incentives particularly for the combustion of municipal refuse, which can be used for fuel instead of land fill and causing pollution.

I have only one regret, and one reservation, which is that I hope that my right hon. Friends will look again at the need to increase the powers to oblige privatised production companies to sell off their surplus power stations, of which they are hoarding more than 100 at the moment—most of them near urban areas. These redundant power station sites are ideal for the private producers, who want to provide competition. It is important that those sites should be made available on a competitive basis.

My regret is that the Government have rejected amendments—including my own—that would have strengthened the obligation to produce electricity more efficiently and less wastefully. That is a missed opportunity, which would have encouraged more efficient electricity production, more city combined heat and power district heating, reduced the emissions of greenhouse gas CO_2 whilst, at the same time, improving energy efficiency and reducing fossil fuel burn.

The United Kingdom has the highest CO_2 release of fossil fuel from energy production per head of population in Europe. We burn more coal and, at the same time, we use only one third of what we put into power stations to convert into electricity. We throw away, in the form of hot water, the other two thirds of the fuel—which other countries increasingly use for space heating, so displacing fossil fuel burn. We should also do that.

The Government could have given a lead—I hope that they will reconsider this—in promoting more energy efficiency by reducing the greenhouse gases and, at the same time,. reducing the threat of global warming. I predict that within two or three years, because of international and EEC pressure, and the need to reach agreement to reduce CO_2 emissions globally, amendments will be made to the Bill in the form that some of us have suggested. I hope that hon. Members of the other place will look again and attend to this most important matter to strengthen the Bill in a way that will give credit to the Government in the longer term.

I hope that the regulator, when appointed, will prove to be as effective as the regulator of British Gas—the director general of Ofgas. He must be a person of such calibre because his responsibilities will be immense and he will determine whether the Government's proposals for competition succeed or fail.

The Bill offers a long overdue restructuring of the industry. It will offer the opportunities that are desperately needed for competition and innovation. It will provide a better deal for consumers and for industry, which has

[Mr. Rost]

complained for far too long about too-high energy costs. It will therefore benefit the economy as a whole. That is why I regard this legislation as far more important than any other privatisation measure that we have introduced over the past decade. Indeed, I regard it as the most significant and radical measure of this Parliament.

In the longer term, this reform will benefit the whole economy and its competitiveness far more than any other measure that we have introduced.

10.20 pm

Mr. Eadie: I intend to be brief.

As we have debated the Bill it has emerged that the consumer has been conned by the idea of the privatisation of the electricity supply industry. On any objective analysis of our discussions, it is certain that the consumer will pay more because of the measure. But that is not the end of it: the taxpayer will pay a price too.

It has also emerged in the course of our debates that private capital is not interested in building thermonuclear power stations unless the Government are prepared to give some guarantees. So the Government are presenting private capital with a cheque to try to induce it to build thermonuclear power stations. Only time will tell whether the cheque is blank.

The Secretary of State for Scotland talked of the great freedom that the Bill would bring about—freedom from interference by the Government. He said that private capital and private industry would determine events. The Bill needs another title—it is not only about the privatisation of electricity; the right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke of the abolition of the Department of Energy. That means the abolition of the pursuit of an energy policy. I predicted six months ago that it was planned to abolish that Department. Ministers and civil servants will become redundant as a result of this Bill. It is a pity that the Under-Secretary of State, who has worked so hard on the Bill, may be one of its casualties.

The Conservative party was responsible for setting up the Department of Energy. Someone told me the other day that the Conservatives are so busy changing the policies and structures of previous Governments that they are now turning in on themselves and beginning to change policies and programmes that they instituted.

The abolition of the Department of Energy would be a tragedy for the country. The Government do not even pretend that there should be an energy policy. The signal to abolish the Department of Energy is the signal that energy policy will be left to free market forces.

It has been clear throughout the passage of the Bill that the people reject it. We heard earlier that as many as 70 per cent. of the electorate opposed the Bill. The Government are ignoring the wishes of the people. They are using their majority to drive through their dogma.

The Bill is being speeded to the other place. The Government are not sure how it will work and to some extent it is a stab in the dark. The Government are passing the Bill with a prayer in their heart. Let us hope that lights do not go out as a consequence of the Bill. I hope that the other place will look closely at it because it is not in the interests of the British people.

10.25 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: As the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) has said, we are now speeding the Bill to the other place. The other House will make amendments that we have failed to have accepted. Even though the Bill is ill-thought out, the Government have accepted virtually no modifications even after 156 hours in Committee and three days of debate in the House. Opposition Members are extremely frustrated that Ministers are not prepared to acknowledge that they have lost many of the arguments and have had to force their will by way of the votes.

I have made it clear from the start that for many years I have not supported the prevailing status quo in the electricity supply industry. The one area in which I have had some possibility of agreement with the Government is in the analysis that restructuring is necessary. It is much more sensible to liberalise before privatising. That is better than creating a duopoly that will not provide effective competition and assuming that an untested carve-up will produce good results for the consumer, although all the evidence suggests that it will not.

The Government have resisted attempts to ensure that the Bill will give high priority to the promotion of energy conservation and reduce the impact of the energy supply industry on the environment. In spite of their protestations outside the House, the Government have resisted every amendment on those subjects. The industry is about to be given to a private sector that has no responsibility to increase energy conservation or to reduce the impact of the industry on the environment. That is a damning indictment of the so-called environmental commitment of the Government. Such a commitment does not exist and to them the pursuit of profit is far more important than concern for the environment and the industry's impact on it.

The way in which the Government have been forced to fix the nuclear component of the Bill has made a mockery of effective competition. The nuclear industry will have to accept that at some time in future it and every other sector of the industry will have to stand up and be counted within a competitive environment. The Government know, because otherwise they would not have structured the Bill in the way that they have, that if that sector of the industry were made to do that it would fall flat on its face. Nobody wishes to invest in that sector. In spite of all the distortions and the fixes that the Government have put into the Bill, all the signs are that the City is still not interested in putting money into the nuclear industry.

The Government have the audacity to lecture people inside and outside the House about free enterprise and the market economy. Yet they are effectively saying to the City of London and the public at large that the nuclear industry will be offered on the basis that the private investor will take the profits and the taxpayer will underwrite the risk. How can the Government continue to claim that they believe in a free market when they are creating an industry more featherbedded than any other sector of the economy? That is the most absurd component in the Bill.

In a rare contribution to the debate on the Bill, the Secretary of State for Scotland said that privatisation will be good for Scotland. Apparently the first good thing that Scotland has got out of it is an increase in electricity prices higher than anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

In Committee we told Ministers that the two specific requirements in the Bill that tariffs should be based on average United Kingdom prices and that, effectively, prices should operate on the basis of return on capital will mean that prices in Scotland will increase faster than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Ministers were not able to deny that. That will be particularly true if the Scottish supply industry is not able to dispose of its substantial surplus activity, which it will have difficulty in doing. In those circumstances, the people of Scotland will experience the opposite effect over the next few years as their electricity bills rise well above the United Kingdom average, with consequent increases in hardship.

The Government have neither succeeded in persuading the House of the virtues of their argument nor, more offensively, even attempted to do so. They have laid back on the size of their parliamentary majority and treated the Opposition with contempt. We can take that because we have become used to it, but, far more important, the Government have treated the British people with contempt. They have shown not the slightest interest in the representations that have been made by a wide variety of interest groups. They have not won any of the arguments, although they will win the vote tonight. They have taken a step that will have to be corrected at a later date by a future Government.

I hope that the prospectus will contain a notification that if there is a change of Government, there will be a change of environment, the regulator will effectively regulate, and real competition will be brought into the industry, rather than the measures that the Government are proposing.

10.30 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The Third Reading of the Bill will see the end of a policy for the electricity industry, the overriding priority of which was to keep the supply going. We have heard a great many statements about how wonderful a private electricity industry will be. No one ever writes to me saying that. On the contrary, I have received an enormous number of letters from constituents who are extremely concerned, as have hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. I am sure that even Conservative Members have received such letters.

We should always remember that, since the formation of the state-run electricity industry, it has met the needs not only of the great cities but of the rural areas. When there were privately run companies, the needs of many of those rural areas were not met. Electricity was not supplied to many of them not because they did not want it but because the companies were not prepared to pay the costs of bringing the supply to them. Now the criterion of profit will be put first.

Even at this late stage, it is wise to comment on the remarks made by Mr. John Baker, the designated head of National Power. He said:

"The job isn't about shouldering national responsibilities but about meeting contracts, improving profitability, about seeking opportunities, but only exploiting them if it pays to do so. . .We need to define ways of running our power stations so that we can exploit our power contracts profitably. Our task will not be to keep the lights on whatever the cost".

That should be made known to the public.

I have read the *Official Report* of the Committee sittings, and have listened to some of the debates in the House. We have heard much about "consumer interests" and "competition". It all sounds wonderful, but there is nothing in the Bill to ensure that there is competition. Prices will not even stabilise, let alone go down. They will increase. The Government imposed increases in 1988 and 1989, and they will be the criteria that the private companies use.

What is most tragic is that, although we are a rich nation, we cannot use our resources without planning over the whole range of electricity policy. But where is any long-term planning provided for in the Bill? Where is real public accountability or consultation enshrined in the Bill? Despite what the Minister has said, nothing of the sort is to be found in it.

I have raised only some of the vital issues that should have been discussed. As those who were members of the Committee that considered the Bill have said, long-term planning, public accountability and consultation were not really discussed in Committee. The great tragedy is that in the long term it will be the British people who will pay for the folly of the privatisation of our great electricity industry. It was highly profitable when it was state run and it met real needs, whether in large cities or small rural areas. The industry met the needs of the British people. They will not be met when the Bill is enacted.

10.35 pm

Mr. Hardy: I hesitated before I decided to speak once again on the Bill. It was the contribution of the Secretary of State for Scotland that persuaded me that I should make some brief comments. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that the electricity industry wanted privatisation. Those who are at the top of the industry, who may see substantial increases in their salaries, may want it. With the contacts that I have in the power industry, I have not detected any wish to embrace privatisation.

The Government may feel that they can persuade those who work in the industry to accept privatisation when they are offered shares, but more and more of them have come to the conclusion that the offer will leave them with less than 1 per cent. of the equity. Relatively shortly after the shares have been allotted, we shall find that there are larger shareholdings in Tokyo, Bonn, Ottawa, New York and all the other financial centres of the world than among those who work in the industry who do not want privatisation.

As Conservative Members have boasted, this is the largest privatisation that the Government have proposed. Conservative Members to a man have trooped through the Government Lobby in support of it. Not one of them has ever asked how much the country will get for the privatisation. The Minister knows that the net asset value of the industry is well over £14 billion. He may be able to reduce that figure by writing down capital, but when the industry is sold it will be lucky if the price is half of its real value.

It was said earlier today that we have already sold the family silver and that now we are selling the family gold. Unfortunately, when the gold is sold it will be at the going rate for silver, not for gold. The interests of the nation will be gravely disregarded. The value of Britain, in terms of the worth of the electricity industry, will be dramatically reduced. The bargain for the consumer will be a bad one. Indeed, the consumer is already paying far more than he should as a result of the sweetening exercise that has taken place since last year.

[Mr. Hardy]

The Government will secure the Bill's passage through Parliament, but over the next two years the British people will realise that they have been robbed. They will realise that their assets have been disposed of cheaply. They will understand that to a large extent profits will accrue for only a small minority. The guarantee of supply, which has been the proud boast of the industry in public hands, will not be guaranteed or sustained in the years ahead. The Government will regret the enactment of the Bill, and from that point of view I suppose that we have some cause for rejoicing. The people have begun to understand that what the Government are about is not in the long-term interests of the nation.

10.38 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: I, too, do not wish to detain the House for long, but the Opposition have an obligation to puncture the utter complacency of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who sought to commend the Third Reading. He trotted out the usual slogans that we have heard from the Government on this and other measures. I thought to myself that one slogan was missing because the Government's slogans came in threes. The right hon. and learned Gentleman used two, talking about choice and consumers. What about value for money? He did not mention it once.

We have heard that we are to have thumping big electricity price rises as a sweetener for the industry. Even the slogans that the right hon. and learned Gentleman used are false. We have heard much about competition. What competition? It is impossible to see any way in which the consumer can make an effective choice about the company from which he gets his electricity. The only option is for him to pay the bill, which will be higher than it has been.

The Secretary of State for Scotland and his colleagues would do well to look again at the recent report of the Select Committee on Energy, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) was a member. Two telling comments will haunt the Government following privatisation. The Committee said:

"Electricity is too important an industry for the country to gamble that everything will come out right";

and

"The Government has singled out only two factors to justify its decision; security of supply and party manifesto commitment to a continuing nuclear programme. It has glossed over the industry's economics, ignored the industry's external costs, and still cannot be sure that the favoured PWR technology is the best available."

Mr. Rost: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: I am not prepared to give way because my contribution must be short.

The public and the consumer have been conned, but the voting public at the next election will not be conned.

10.41 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson: I am not an economist or accountant. My background is in engineering and my discussion on the Bill has been with engineers in the industry. The engineers—not the management—are critical of the privatisation propositions. One engineer commented, "It is like a bicycle. If the pedals and the cranks are taken off the chain and the sprockets on the wheel., the bicycle will not work." That is what is happening with the industry.

The implication is that the CEGB and the area boards have not been efficient. Having spent some time with the good officers of the North Western electricity board, I refute that suggestion. That board was very efficient. My experience was that it was exceptional. I have links with the electricity board in my area which is aware of the consumers' needs and problems.

If a problem is to arise with the industry, it will be a technical one. If there is an argument to restore the industry to state control, it will be a technical one which will be irrefutable. The industry started with a municipal electricity supply and links with private electricity suppliers. There was no choice between the wars other than to have a nationalised industry. That argument will be made again, and we shall have to restore the industry to public ownership not for political but for technical reasons.

10.34 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams: As I said in Committee and on Report, the Government have been on the defensive throughout the Bill's proceedings. That has been symbolised by the fact that only one Conservative Back Bencher has spoken on Third Reading. Often in Standing Committee the Secretary of State and Ministers were not just on the defensive but on the ropes—indeed, they were punch drunk at the end of several sittings from trying to defend some of the clauses.

I find no merit in the Bill. It will create a private monopoly because there will be no competition. Earlier, we challenged the Minister directly about what competition there would be for the individual householder. I think of people such as my mother, who is a widow and a pensioner. Apparently she can opt out and I suppose that she could devise her own supply, but in reality there will be no competition. The Bill also brings threats of price rises—6 per cent., 9 per cent. and much more to come when the shareholders want their cut.

The Bill provided an opportunity for measures on the environment and conservation, but the Government have pushed all such opportunities to one side. We have seen clearly that their commitment to the environment and green issues is non-existent. The Bill shows clearly the double standards for coal and the nuclear industry. The Government are carrying out a clear vendetta against the coal industry, which dates from the 1970s or even earlier than that. The Government are the descendants of the coal owners. [HON. MEMBERS: "Back to 1926."] That is right. The vendetta goes back to 1926 and before, and it has returned with a vengeance in the 1970s and 1980s and as a result of the miners' strike. I come from a part of the country that used to have many coal mines, but there are none left now. When I was elected, there were three just outside my constituency, but the number is down to one. Throughout our debates, we have seen the terrific pressure that will be put on the coal industry by privatisation and the free range of market forces—coal imports and the like. There will be no ring fencing or defence for the coal industry.

The nuclear industry will be completely ring-fenced under the Bill, with the nuclear quota, the nuclear tax and the pressurised water reactors that nobody wants. There

will be problems of waste and decommissioning, yet the Government volunteer to take back those problems and to pay the bills. That is an appalling double standard. The public have noticed that fact through the reports of our debates and we shall carry on explaining that to them. They have noticed that one set of principles is applied to coal, whereas the nuclear industry is to be protected.

Dr. Kim Howells: I want to reinforce my hon. Friend's point. It is curious that the Government have chosen to ring-fence the nuclear industry as a reliable source of energy and electricity, yet they have refused to ring-fence the Nottingham coalfield, which in their books has been a marvellous and reliable source of electricity and energy. It is curious. We own the coal underground in Nottinghamshire, yet we do not own the uranium that we send to our nuclear power stations.

Mr. Williams: The Government's logic is strange. However, the public have seen what is happening and they do not like the Bill or the privatisation of water. Public opinion is overwhelmingly on our side. We have tried to reflect the views of the consumers, the taxpayers and the electorate. Unfortunately, the Government have not accepted any of our clauses or amendments and they will suffer for that at the hour of reckoning.

10.48 pm

Mr. Maxton: I shall be brief, but it is essential to make several points before this obnoxious piece of legislation leaves the Commons, especially in view of the case put by the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is deputising for the Secretary of State for Energy who is yet again swanning round the world.

Nothing in Committee or on Report has convinced me that I was wrong to argue that we should never have had Scottish legislation dealt with in an English and Welsh Bill. It has made it difficult to put the Scottish case and the Scottish people have not had the opportunity to consider it fully. Of course, it has exposed cruelly the Tory party's total failure to persuade the Scottish people of their case and their inability to conform to the normal constitutional conventions on Scottish legislation in this House because of their disastrous defeat in Scotland in 1987.

The Bill, like the Tory party itself, has little support in Scotland. Despite what the Secretary of State said, few employees at any level believe that the Bill will do anything for Scotland. Among the consumer organisations, political parties and churches in Scotland, it is difficult to find anyone who is not opposed to the Bill. Its opponents, I may add, include the Scottish CBI. The people of Scotland want their electricity supply industry to remain in public hands, and the Government have a responsibility, which they never fulfil, to listen to their voices.

My hon. Friends have shown that the Bill will create no real competition in England and Wales. The vertically integrated nature of the new companies in Scotland, with generation, transmission and supply all carried out by one company in clearly delineated geographical areas of Scotland, will deprive Scottish consumers of even a phoney facade of competition. The Bill creates private monopolies which, despite the so-called controls that the licences and regulation are supposed to impose on them, will be able to exploit their position to maximise profit at the expense of Scottish consumers.

Yet again the Secretary of State for Scotland abdicated his responsibility for the electricity supply industry in Scotland. The headquarters of the South of Scotland electricity board are in my constituency, and most of the board members live in or near my constituency. The headquarters of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board are in Edinburgh. If the Secretary of State had read his own press release or had bothered to attend our debates last week, during which I quoted him, he would know that it said that he had issued an instruction to the boards in connection with their financial limits. It was not the Treasury that did that; it was the Secretary of State for Scotland.

At present, control of the electricity supply industry in Scotland rests in Scotland. The Government have not given us a single guarantee that after privatisation that control will lie anywhere other than outside Scotland—perhaps even outside the United Kingdom.

The price of electricity has already been increased by 8 per cent. to fatten up the industry to make it attractive to the new shareholders, as Mr. Joughin, the chairman of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board said. If that can happen before privatisation, how much worse will it be afterwards? The Bill will mean higher prices, poorer services for consumers, probably the end of the coal industry in Scotland, a deterioration in the environment and hardship for the poorest members of society. The Bill is unwanted and unnecessary. Its sole purpose is to give fast bucks to the Government's friends in the City, and I ask my hon. Friends to join me in voting against its Third Reading.

10.52 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: Rather to the Opposition's surprise, we have been happy to join them on what they thought was their chosen ground—the issue of prices—because we know that it must exert a downward pressure on prices if we replace the present structure of the industry under which a monopoly generates its own costs and supplies the industry on the basis of those costs, without intervention.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) designated today consumer day. I told the House that, once the Bill has been passed, every day will be consumer day because every aspect of the Bill is devoted to ensuring that the consumer gets a better deal. That is not only true in relation to prices; there will be a panoply of consumer rights and competitive pressure not only on generation, which accounts for 70 per cent. of the industry's costs, but on the public electricity supply industries. New duties will be placed on the regulator to ensure that the consumer is well cared for. In particular—something that the Opposition have not been willing to concede as a great new benefit—consumer committees will in future be part of the regulatory body rather than merely shouting their views from the touch line.

In this short debate the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) rightly said that this will be the largest privatisation of all time. Added to the 9 million shareholders—three times the number when we took office—will no doubt be considerably more private shareholders, and many will no doubt be the employees of the industry to whom we shall give special terms.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

One enormous advantage of privatisation will be that the massive investment programme that is due to take place in the industry will be determined not on the basis of decisions——

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West) *rose*——

Mr. Spicer: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman has not been here——

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Spicer: No, I shall not give way. It is too late. I am not giving way to the hon Gentleman or to anybody else at this stage because I have promised to be brief.

Massive investment decisions are ahead. The decisions to invest will be made not on the basis of political infighting in Whitehall or behind beige doors in Whitehall, but on the basis of market conditions, and will be determined by the market place.

Our reforms of the electricity supply industry, which are undoubtedly radical, are aimed at making Britain's electricity supply industry one of the most efficient in the world. We believe that as the European market opens up in 1992 and transnational common carriage becomes a real possibility, Britain will have the opportunity to become the power house of Europe.

What we are proposing to do is what some people have argued is impossible—to turn a massive producer-driven public sector monopoly into a series of customer-oriented private companies, many with shares that are owned by their employees and many of which will be competing with one another for business. In future the customer will call the tune, which is something that, despite all the protestations to the contrary, all the rhetoric and all the press releases, is not and never will be central to the beliefs of the Socialist party, the Opposition.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 251, Noes 193.

Division No. 151] **[10.57 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'Y's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stanl'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm

Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Widdecombe, Ann
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Maclean and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
(L'pool B G'n)
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliott
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen Adams and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Lord Chancellor (Salary)

11.10 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): I beg to move,

That the draft Lord Chancellor's Salary Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 14th March, be approved.

The need for this order arises out of the link between the salaries of the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice. The independent Top Salaries Review Body recommended in 1983 that the Lord Chancellor should be paid more than the Lord Chief Justice in recognition of his position as the head of the judiciary and of his wider responsibilities. The House accepted the principle of the TSRB recommendation, and has successively reaffirmed that with the approval of the Lord Chancellor's salary orders for the years 1984 to 1988.

An annual Lord Chancellor's salary order is necessary because the Lord Chief Justice's salary is set annually following the recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body. This year the TSRB recommended a salary of £89,500 for the Lord Chief Justice—a 5 per cent. increase. The Government accepted that that figure be paid from the due date of 1 April 1989.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House quite sure that he has got all his Tory Back Benchers into line on this issue?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): No.

Mr. Skinner: Already, we have heard the first cuckoo.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there has been a lot of talk in the corridors from Tory Members of Parliament, barristers and others in the legal profession, who are fuming with the current Lord Chancellor—on his big fat salary of £91,500 a year—for trying to introduce those new measures and upsetting their cosy little existence? How many votes does the right hon. Gentleman expect to get tonight if there is a Division?

Mr. Wakeham: I have been here long enough to know not to count the votes before a Division. I attended the debate in the House of Lords on Friday and I did not see the hon. Gentleman there.

Mr. Skinner: I was in here.

Mr. Wakeham: I was in here, too, earlier on. The debate was a much more balanced affair than the hon. Gentleman might have thought.

The Lord Chancellor has a salary lead of £2,000. The House accepted this figure in 1983 and it has remained at that level since. Its real value has eroded since it was first established, but that is of little significance in itself and is not a valid reason for changing it. The lead exists because the Lord Chancellor is head of the judiciary, and that makes it right that an appropriate differential should exist between him and the Lord Chief Justice.

The order establishes the Lord Chancellor's salary at £91,500 from the day it comes into force. It cannot be made retrospective. The salary level derives directly from a TSRB report and embodies a principle established six years ago, which has been accepted by the House on six previous occasions. I hope that once again it will commend itself to the House this year.

I commend the order to the House.

11.13 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): It may be appropriate for me to comment, as a member of the Scots Bar, about the salary of a Lord Chancellor who appears determined to make alterations to the structure of the law of England that I regard as devastatingly improper in relation to the benefit of the client in England. I feel that I can say so for two reasons. First, as it is not my Bar and it will not affect me, nobody can say, "He would say that, wouldn't he?" [HON. MEMBERS: "He would say that wouldn't he?"] Those hon. Members may know that there is a consultation paper in Scotland that does not make the proposals which have been made by the Lord Chancellor for the law in England.

I know that the Leader of the House listened to parts of the debate in the other place on Friday. Some of us also heard large parts of that debate, including the remarks of the Lord Chief Justice and the Master of the Rolls. Whatever their language, it was clear to those of us who listened that they did not take the view that the Scottish Lord Chancellor, as head of the English judiciary, had consulted them. From the language of the Lord Chief Justice's speech I should have thought that the order, which provides for the Lord Chancellor to receive a £2,000 lead over the Lord Chief Justice, might have been irked in the circumstances.

There are three matters that I will put before the House for its consideration. The first is the allegation in the proposals in the Green Paper entitled

"The Work and Organisation of the Legal Profession."

that the changes will make it cheaper for the client.

When the Lord Chancellor was dean of the Faculty of Advocates in Scotland it was suggested that the costs of divorce would be reduced if divorce were transferred from the exclusive right of audience in the Court of Session to the sheriff court. Costs have doubled.

The Green Paper says that barristers in England face the extraordinary difficulty of being unable to find chambers in the crowded facilities of the Inns of Court. The Lord Chancellor has a flat in the Inns of Court as well as a tithe cottage at the other end of this House.

Most important of all, if one removes from the people who have to go to law the right to choose a specialist one will not only remove the service that they should receive, but increase the price of that service. In addition, it will destroy what is most special about the difference between specialist advocates and general solicitors. The general solicitor has a symbolic relationship with his client whereas the relationship between the advocate and his client is singular and provides a service of excellence that is infinitely cheaper than would be the case were the system destroyed by the current proposals which have been poorly thought out. They are in contradistinction of the recommendations made by the Lord Chancellor when he was dean of the Faculty of Advocates which spoke of the essential requirement to keep the Bar intact and separate. I say that as a Scotsman. It is an ill-service to the law of England.

Opposition Members on the funny Benches frequently say that Scotland is being used as a guinea pig for the community charge. I do not like England being used as a guinea pig by a Scottish Lord Chancellor. If he wants freedom of choice and a legal profession that we can all afford, what about if he forgoes his salary until his case is proven?

11.20 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The question is: is the Lord Chancellor doing such a fine job that he deserves a salary increase? What a pity that we have only one and a half hours in which to discuss this extremely important matter, because I have enough to say on the subject to make the four and a half hour speech that I dedicated to trying to stop the poisoning of our drinking water by the addition of fluoride seem like the twinkling of an eye. It is also a pity that we have only this golden one and a half hours once a year to exercise any control—or at any rate, any influence—over the Lord Chancellor's discharge of his political duties.

By what criteria should we presume to judge whether the work of so eminent a legal luminary, so highly regarded a judicial figure, so well-admired and well-liked a political person, is worthy of the accolade that we are asked to give him tonight, expressed in the sordid terminology of money? May I have the temerity to suggest a test? Is the Lord Chancellor going to improve the legal system of the United Kingdom so that it will better serve the people—not the lawyers—of Britain? Is he making the legal system cheaper and more accessible for the consumer? Will it be a service of higher quality for the consumer?

By these criteria, sadly I have to conclude that many people who know and understand these matters are by no means convinced that—however good, honourable and well-intentioned a man, however brilliant a Scottish lawyer and judge he may have been, however eminent and well loved he undoubtedly is to anyone who has been privileged to know him personally in his work—the Lord Chancellor is the wrong man for this salary at this time.

No other Lord Chancellor in living memory, perhaps in our history, has succeeded in antagonising almost the entire legal profession throughout the land. Has there ever been a debate in the House of Lords, on a Friday of all days, in which 56 of their Lordships rose—nearly all of them in anger—at his well-meaning but destructive proposals? They will pull up by the roots the legal profession as we know it, which—for all its faults—still works reasonably well and is the envy of the civilised world.

Are all the greatest legal minds of the land incensed for no reason? These include the Lord Chief Justice of England, two former Lord Chancellors, the Master of the Rolls, all nine Law Lords and a most distinguished former Attorney-General who threatened to resign the Conservative Whip. There is also an impressive list of non-lawyer luminaries—many from the Opposition side—including Lord Benson, chairman of the recent royal commission on legal services, Lord Rees-Mogg, the former editor of *The Times*, who felt so strongly that he used his maiden speech to speak against the proposals, Lord Murray of Epping Forest and Lord Longford. That is a long list of unquestioned authority and influence from Opposition as well as Conservative Benches and outside Parliament are the——

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose*——

Mr. Lawrence: I shall give way in a moment. Outside Parliament are the High Court and circuit judges, and most of the Bar.

None of the people in the House of Lords have the slightest financial interest in seeing the proposals defeated and cannot conceivably be said to be speaking in self-interest. It is a great achievement for the Lord Chancellor to have set so many of the people in the land who are best qualified through experience and judgment to assess the likely effects of the proposals against the Government and against their proposals for legal reform.

Mr. Wareing: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that what distinguishes the Lord Chancellor from all the other people he has mentioned is that the Lord Chancellor was chosen by the Prime Minister, and that none of the present Government of yes men and women would defy her? If the hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting that the Lord Chancellor's salary should be decreased, at least in real terms, should not the same be done to the Prime Minister's salary? Should not the hon. and learned Gentleman direct his wrath against the Prime Minister and the Government, who consult no one?

Mr. Lawrence: If I raised my wrath against the Prime Minister, I would be called out of order—would I not, Madam Deputy Speaker?—as this is a debate about the Lord Chancellor's salary. Since I have no complaint to make about our excellent Prime Minister, who, in every field of her endeavour as leader of the——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman is now being called to order. He is straying from the point.

Mr. Lawrence: It is only out of deference to your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I forbear from dwelling even longer on the achievements of our Prime Minister, the great leader of the country, who, in the——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have called the hon. and learned Gentleman to order. I am sure that he will contain himself now and speak to the order before us.

Mr. Lawrence: In the matter of the Lord Chancellor's salary, my right hon. Friend is making her first-ever error.

There are many reasons why the three Green Papers have been so angrily attacked. There are constitutional reasons and reasons of principle. I want to mention one particular sort of harm that will be done—the harm to the ordinary consumer of legal services. The claim that these proposals will be consumer-friendly is about as absurd as the claim that the salmonella scare will boost the sale of eggs.

Let us consider the cost of legal services under the proposals. If a young man or woman wants to leave university and go into the legal profession now, he or she has the choice of going to the Bar, which will be slow in yielding its returns but which in due course will give the right of audience to the higher courts, the right to become a Queen's Counsel, and the right to become a High Court judge. If the proposals go through, the graduate wanting to enter the legal profession will find all those advantages in becoming a solicitor, because the solicitor will have the right of audience in the higher courts, the right to become a Queen's Counsel and the right to become a High Court judge.

On top of that, the graduate will be able, if he joins a solicitor's firm, to be guaranteed a pension, holidays with pay, a car, steady work and a roof over his head—the kind of attractions which the Bar does not offer. In those

[Mr. Lawrence]

circumstances, who in his right mind would choose the risks of the Bar in preference to the absence of risk involved in joining a solicitors' firm? Almost every graduate in his right mind will choose to become a solicitor, and very few—there may be some—will prefer the misery of going to the Bar to the luxury of becoming a solicitor. If such people want to become advocates, they will become solicitor advocates, and the supply of barristers of the independent Bar will dry up.

At the other end of the profession, there are people at the Bar who have spent 20 or 30 years running around Britain. They are the people who have to wait for two, three or four weeks for another case to come on stream after the case in which they were involved has collapsed. They would leap at the offer of an advocate solicitorship with a leading firm in the City with all the luxuries and the assurance of the steady income that would accrue. At that end of the profession the Bar would be depleted.

At the end of the day fewer people will come to the Bar, there will be fewer people at the top and a much smaller independent Bar. Anyone who wants to be represented by a Marshall Hall or by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) can go to the cab rank. People can go to the wonderful firm of solicitors of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker). Someone seeking legal services can instruct my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross and will get the best barrister in the land instructed by the best solicitor in the land.

But if my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross decided to join the firm of my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North, people who need the services of a barrister would have to go to that firm in London to get his specific representation in court. The cab rank principle will disappear, one of the achievements of the British Bar and the British legal system will be diminished, and the consumer will suffer.

If there is a smaller cab rank and the number of independent barristers is reduced, what will happen to the provincial solicitor? I am talking about the small two or three-man firm in the country areas—most of the areas of Britain. Most of our constituents employ small country solicitors who cannot afford to have an advocate partner but instruct barristers to represent the interests of their clients in the most effective and efficient way. If there is no cab rank and those solicitors cannot make a living because their conveyancing work has all gone to estate agents, building societies and finance houses in the high street, they will close down and go to the big towns and cities to make a living.

The smaller consumer who wants to seek legal advice from a solicitor in a small town will not be able to find one and will have to go to the big towns and cities and pay big city prices. If that is one of the likely results of the Green Papers, who will suffer because of the lack of legal advice and legal services, not just from the Bar but from solicitors? The ordinary consumer, the person who sends us to this House and expects us to vote for salary increases for Lord Chancellors who will improve legal services, will suffer.

There is also the matter of quality. I accept that solicitors are inherently as capable as barristers. However, they are not specialists and they are not trained in court work in the way that barristers are. They are unlikely to do the job as efficiently as barristers. Most of our solicitors deal with divorces, wills and conveyancing and with many kinds of problems, some of which are referred to us in our surgeries. Now and again they go to court and are expected to conduct an adequate defence of someone charged with rape, with running someone down or with killing a citizen through dangerous driving. If they are not doing that kind of work all the time, of course they are not as skilled.

I understand the points about monopoly and restrictive practices. We have a parallel in the medical profession. We would not expect the general practitioner who is advising Mrs. Bloggins about her cold, her varicose veins, her limp, her tiredness—a thousand different ills—to turn up and do a heart-lung transplant. We would, however, expect a surgeon who does heart-lung transplants, hip operations or lip operations day in, day out to be a skilled operator.

We do not say, "Let us abolish the rank of consultant" or "Let us abolish the rank of surgeon" because the general practitioner is as able as any surgeon or consultant to operate or give detailed advice. That would be nonsense, and we should adopt the same approach to solicitors and barristers. The barrister is the surgeon who operates in court; the barrister is the consultant. The solicitor is the general practitioner. That is the system which the Lord Chancellor is seeking to overthrow, and that is the reason why we should seriously consider whether his salary ought to be paid at all, let alone increased.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): Can my hon. and learned Friend explain why in Truro and Barnstaple rights of audience are already equal for solicitors and barristers? Are people in those areas getting a poor service from solicitors?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should be obliged if the hon. and learned Gentleman would not go down that path. The scope of the debate is very narrow. May I remind the House that it should be addressed to the merits of the increased salary levels specified in the draft order?

Mr. Lawrence: Solicitors do not operate the same code as barristers. Solicitors take statements from——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have called the attention of the hon. and learned Gentleman to the scope of the debate. I am sure that he will not ignore guidelines from the Chair.

Mr. Lawrence: I have those guidelines constantly in mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, but to save time I will not repeat them every time I start a new sentence. I am saying that any changes in the visiting system whereby solicitors can take statements from witnesses and barristers cannot —which means that the present way of conducting criminal trials in particular is the best way of achieving high quality and high representation—should not be changed by the Lord Chancellor. When we decide whether his salary is appropriate, we must give that matter consideration.

Barristers are forbidden to take statements directly from witnesses. If a solicitor were able to appear in the higher court and take statements directly from witnesses, the temptation to tarnish the purity of a legal system,

which means that the integrity with which we conduct our criminal trials is of the highest, is a risk simply not worth taking.

A ruthless professional code maintains the integrity of our Bar. The barrister is watched by the solicitor, and by the judge; he dare not do anything wrong. But no one will know whether the high street solicitor who is taking a statement from the witness is doing wrong or right.

The integrity of that aspect of the system has nothing to do with the inherent integrity of a barrister and that of a solicitor, but everything to do with a system that encourages the right approach; and that system is under threat. The professionals—the judges in their Lordships' House—know the dangers of the proposed changes.

Many things are wrong with the legal system. Much could be done to improve it, but tearing the legal profession up by the roots will not solve any of the problems that face our constituents as consumers. They want greater access to legal aid, and to be able to go to a court on a particular day for a particular case and be sure that it will come on. If we want to achieve that, we need computers everywhere, and we need to make sure that the Lord Chancellor's office improves the administration of our courts. Those are the solutions to the problems that concern our people.

Nothing that is suggested in the Green Papers—whether it is replacing the system of payment by a win at all costs proposal, or stripping conveyancing away from the country solicitors so that they are no longer available, or taking away the independence of the Bar by shrinking it so that it is not available or is available only at increased costs, because those costs have to include pensions, overheads, holidays with pay and a car—will set right what is wrong with our legal system.

Because the Lord Chancellor is proposing destructive measures rather than such constructive measures as the extension of the legal aid system to those who need it or the improvement of the administration of our courts, I invite my colleagues on both sides of the House to consider carefully whether this is not the moment to show the Lord Chancellor that we are not as enthusiastic about his Green Papers as he appears to be. He is so enthusiastic that precious little time is being given for consultation——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is the third time that I have got to my feet to remind the hon. and learned Gentleman that this is not a debate on the Green Papers. For the third time, I am telling him that he must contain himself and speak to the order before us, and not stray from it.

Mr. Lawrence: The order concerns an increase in the salary of the Lord Chancellor. If he is making proposals that will make legal services less available to the consumers and at a higher cost and lower quality, surely we are able to say that he ought not to be entitled to this increase in salary, and so I say.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Not in this debate. The hon. and learned Gentleman has made an extensive speech, and covered a great deal of ground. Other hon. Members wish to speak, so I should be glad if he would refer to the order.

Mr. Lawrence: I said, "and so I say" and that was the end of my speech.

11.42 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) will have an opportunity to vote against the order, and it will be interesting to see what action he and other barristers in the House take.

I am not opposed to the order on the ground that the activities of the Lord Chancellor are necessarily wrong. I do not share the view of the vested interest expressed by the hon. and learned Gentleman. I am opposed to it because it proposes a salary of £91,500 for an individual, which is far too much. It demonstrates the massive inequality in our society when one bears in mind that, about 12 months ago, the House passed orders cutting housing benefit and income support, and that child benefit has been frozen for two years. Someone who has the patronage of the Prime Minister, who has been endorsed and appointed by the Prime Minister, is to be given such a salary because there must be a differential of £2,000 over the salary of the Lord Chief Justice. What a load of nonsense it is to the millions of people who are suffering under this Government because of cuts in a wide range of supplementary benefits, and because pensioners were so badly hit by the cuts——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is this in order?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall call any hon. Member to order, whether he speaks from the Government or the Opposition Benches, if he or she strays. I ask the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) to confine himself to the order that is before the House, which concerns the merits of the proposed increase for the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Cryer: I endorse your view, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I make a comparison between the poverty-stricken levels of benefit that the Government are paying——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Oi!

Mr. Cryer: I am getting back my breath after hearing the rude noises that have come from the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who has been shouting at you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in what I would describe as an undignified way. I would like to defend you against these incursions, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: May I say with respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, that, while you were quite properly speaking to the Clerk, I was seeking to draw attention to the fact that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was straying vastly from the point? That is what I was seeking to bring to your notice, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Cryer: I was seeking to clarify your useful ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker, by referring to the massive inequalities that are imposed on the poorest of our people by the Government. That can be referred to in passing by way of explanation. Having done so, I wish only to say that the Lord Chancellor is not worth £91,500. It is an outrage and a disgrace that anyone who secured his job through patronage should be paid such a sum. The Lord Chancellor's job was not advertised and he did not go through the interview process to which ordinary people have to subject themselves. It is because he happens to

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have the beneficial eye of the Prime Minister upon him that it is proposed to pay a massive sum to keep him ahead of the salary of the Lord Chief Justice. That shows to ordinary people that we are engaged in the economics of the mad house.

I propose to divide the House on the order when the Question is put. All those, including the hon. and learned Member for Burton, who wish to vote against it will have that opportunity. We shall see what the outcome is.

11.48 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): It would be wrong and deplorable if it were thought by the public that the sentiments of the Bar were adequately conveyed by the remarks of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence). Many members of the Bar support what the Lord Chancellor is attempting to do.

I have been a member of the English Bar for nearly 30 years during which time there have been five or six Lord Chancellors. Every one of them until the present one has sat on proposals for reform. The Bar knows that reform is urgent and that its privileges rather than its excellence sustain its position and status in society. As time has passed that has become increasingly the position. The only thing that should guarantee the status of the independent Bar of England is its quality and its excellence. It does not need the artificial privileges which it has secured over the years because of the way in which it has been able to persuade Lord Chancellors and other judges.

It is said by those such as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton that the Bar is opposed to the Lord Chancellor and what he wishes to do by way of reform. The present Lord Chancellor came to us like a breath of fresh air in a fetid atmosphere. He is proposing to do something which previous Lord Chancellors have not had the courage to do. He is worth every penny of the proposed increase.

11.50 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Before the Lord Chancellor can be worth an increase in salary, he should put his house in order. I am speaking not about anything to do with the legal profession but about the processes of the courts and of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

The legal profession is sometimes accused, rightly—usually the blame falls on solicitors—of holding up the process of justice. However, many of the most worrying delays in that process are caused in the courts administered by the Lord Chancellor. For example, a constituent of mine, a boy with no previous convictions aged about 19, was convicted of an offence of arson. He applied for leave to appeal against his sentence, which was 15 months youth custody. By the time his application for leave to appeal had been rejected in what is not much more than a paper procedure carried out by a single judge, he was one month from his parole. It is unforgiveable that such delays should exist in the administration of justice.

I shall give another example of why, before tearing the profession apart, the Lord Chancellor should rip up some of his procedures in his Department and the courts and start again. In most magistrates courts, because of the blockage of work, both an accused person who chooses, as is his right, to have contested committal proceedings in a criminal case, and the prosecution—they are affected equally—will have to wait months for the proceedings to take place.

What are the consequences? Every case that comes before a jury depends on a question something like, "Who killed Cock Robin?" Who was standing at the bus stop at half-past five on the afternoon in question? Who signed the document in question? What was in his mind at that time? It all depends on the credibility of witnesses. If these cases have to linger before they are heard, how can juries be expected to make reliable judgments on the credibility of witnesses?

The Lord Chancellor's salary, like, apparently, the salaries of everyone else at which the Government look closely, should be related in some way to his Department's efficiency and performance. Despite the considerable efforts of the Lord Chief Justice, the Master of the Rolls, Lord Justice Watkins and the judge in charge of the civil lists to hasten proceedings, the efficiency of the Lord Chancellor's Department as expressed through the speed of the courts is not very good and certainly does not justify such a large increase in salary.

The Lord Chancellor's aim, and presumably the justification for increasing his salary, on the ground that he is becoming more effective, is to make the law more accessible to the consumer. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) started on an interesting little list when he was talking about the provincial solicitor. He said that the provincial solicitor advises the consumer on all sorts of matters—I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned probate, matrimonial law, conveyancing——

Mr. Lawrence: Divorce.

Mr. Carlile: Matrimonial law includes divorce. It is a long time since the hon. and learned Gentleman did a divorce case.

Then the hon. and learned Gentleman ran out of subjects. He did so because the Lord Chancellor in his Government is failing in the most obvious method of bringing the law closer to the consumer. The consumer should be able to obtain a solicitor's advice if he is sacked from his job and wants to go to an industrial tribunal. The consumer should be able to obtain a solicitor's advice freely if he has problems with the Department of Social Security. Those are just two examples.

The consumer should be entitled to legal aid if he has been defamed. We can test the Lord Chancellor's efficiency by the accessibility to the courts that he is giving the ordinary consumer. An obvious way of achieving that, which would earn him a much bigger increase in salary, would be to change the mingy legal regulations that the Government are imposing, rather than tearing up the professions.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I do not wish to stray from the matter, but I must point out that legal aid provisions are nothing to do with the Lord Chancellor's Department. Matrimonial law is to do with the law of marriage and children and the law of divorce is called consistorial law.

Mr. Carlile: The Lord Chancellor's efficiency is apparently being judged by his own lights, in the accessibility to the law that he gives to the consumer.

Now let us assume for a moment that the Green Papers are turned into legislation in some way in the next Session.

Despite what I have said so far, in that event it seems that the Lord Chancellor will be given far too small a salary increase. If the Green Papers become law, he should be given far more; for look at the extra burden that he is taking upon himself. He is taking control of the ethics of the legal profession. No Government in the history of the country—apart for the Government of Oliver Cromwell, if they merit the name Government—have sought to take control of the ethics of the legal profession. If the Lord Chancellor is to take that responsibility on himself and if the Government intend to destroy the independence of the Bar and other advocates by telling the profession what its professional ethics should be, he probably merits £10,000 more a year in his salary for the extra responsibility involved.

I venture to suggest that when there has been mature reflection, the Government and the Lord Chancellor—who is a thoughtful man—will decide that it would be a dangerous step for the Government to dictate to lawyers whether, for example, they can cross-examine police officers, or whether they will be able to exercise the independence shown in the constituency of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) during the miners' strike, as independence that barristers exercised so effectively in cases concerning miners. The hon. Gentleman knows that well.

Mr. Skinner: Name one.

Mr. Carlile: I can name barristers who stood for the independence of the people whom his union supported in the miners' strike—such as Ms. Lang, a member of my chambers—and who supported by their independent advocacy the miners of his constituency. If the Government take over the professional ethical code of lawyers——

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No, because the hon. Gentleman has had his shout. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Carlile: If the Government take over the professional ethical code of barristers——

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: I may give way to the hon. Gentleman if he shows some evidence of listening. If the Government take over the professional ethics of barristers, that is one step down the road of tyranny. It may be a tyranny that the hon. Gentleman's brand of Socialism will welcome. I am very suspicious about it and I am surprised that real Tories are willing to go down that road.

Mr. Skinner: There used to be a story, which the hon. and learned Gentleman destroyed tonight, if it had not already been destroyed, that members of the old Liberal party were radicals, or "wadicals" as "Woy" used to call them. The hon. and learned Gentleman now says that it is all right to hammer the dockers and every working class group in England but that the lawyers must be left alone.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. What have the dockers to do with the Lord Chancellor's salary?

Mr. Carlile: I do not think that I mentioned the dockers, but let me clarify what I am saying to the hon. Member for Bolsover. It is important to leave the independence of lawyers alone and not to take them under Government control.

There is another reason why the Lord Chancellor may need an increase in salary. His job as a judge will be that much more difficult. The proposals in the Green Paper would entitle lawyers to full advocacy certificates not on the basis of their competence—there would be no test of competence—but because they had stood up in court and done a given number of a particular type of case, however, badly. That is what the Green Paper amounts to: there is no quality control whatever. Judges in this country—the Lord Chancellor earns his salary as a judge, the head of the judiciary—depend upon receiving guidance as to the applicable law from those appearing in front of them. If the quality of those appearing in front of them is not as rigorously controlled, both by competence and the market, as it is at the moment, we shall have a judiciary that is embattled, oversized and probably therefore less competent. The Lord Chancellor's budget will increase exponentially and that, I suppose, will force us to recognise, on that cynical basis, that he will have to be given an increase in salary.

I trust in what we heard from the Lord Chancellor in the other place last Friday, that if there is to be legislation in the next Session, careful consideration will be given to all the points put before him. If he is to be worth the salary that will, no doubt, be voted to him tonight, he must pay careful attention to those points and, above all other things, to the independence of the law.

12.3 am

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I feel compelled to speak because of what I have heard from other barristers on both sides of the House.

I shall support the order increasing the Lord Chancellor's salary, although I fully agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) that there are failings in the Lord Chancellor's Department. I shall support the increase because the present Lord Chancellor is the first since the 1980s to make the people and the legal profession respectively sit up and think about what they want from the profession and how consumers' needs can best be met.

One important point seems to have been overlooked in the debate. The Lord Chancellor merits his salary because he has written three excellent Green Papers. I hasten to add that they are all green, which means that they are all being consulted upon. It can only be a welcome development for this country to discuss what we expect from our lawyers and how they ought to deliver their services.

There are many ways in which the present legal system is inadequate. Access to the Bar is at present pitifully small. When I was a young barrister—no, I am still a young barrister. When I was training there were 113 people on my course, but a mere 23 got pupillage. Of those, only four got chambers and those four were sons of judges or barristers who were already in Chambers. We must look at the way in which access to the Bar is awarded. It would be most welcome if people could become solicitors more easily and compete with those whom the

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

Bar has selected as being the most appropriate people, so that those who are the best advocates can represent the public.

Much has been said about the Lord Chancellor not meriting his salary because of the effect of the Green Papers on the Bar. But why is it expected that the Bar will disappear? Have we no confidence in our Bar and in its containing the finest legal professionals available?

About 80 per cent. of solicitors in this country are in partnerships of fewer than four people. All those solicitors, throughout the country, will need specialists on whom they can call, so there will be a market for the Bar. Why, therefore, is it assumed that all the barristers will be snapped up by big firms in the City? Large firms such as Coward Chance have already said that they are not interested in entertaining the prima donnas of the Bar. They are not interested in paying the sort of salaries that those at the top of the specialist Bar want to command and they are not interested in recruiting those who are not specialists.

The most important thing about the proposals in the Lord Chancellor's Green Papers has been the welcome fact that for the first time we are talking about the legal system meeting the needs of the consumer. Until recently the word "consumer" never appeared in the legal profession, but surely the whole system should be pointed towards the consumer. Many consumers who come to my surgeries seem to think that the legal process in this country is a lottery in which only the rich or the most determined take part, and I think that they are absolutely right. I hear nothing from my constituents about the legal system, apart from the fact that it is uncertain and that it takes a long time.

Most ordinary people do not think that the present legal system with its two tiers of solicitors and barristers is meeting their real needs in the best and most appropriate way. We all know that at the junior end of the Bar the consumer is being asked to pay for a two-tier system but is taking delivery of only one tier. When we are instructed to appear in the market towns of England we are given a piece of paper with perhaps little more on it than a chap's name, and we are expected to do what used to be called a "dock brief"—in other words, to find out what the case is about, do the necessary and send the brief back with a suitable fee on it. That is not what the consumer deserves and it is not what the consumer should have. That is why the Lord Chancellor's Green Papers are welcome.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am horrified that the law of England still has barristers who, without proper instructions, nevertheless appear for clients, which is in contradiction of their duty. I trust that my hon. Friend never has.

I am interested to know whether my hon. Friend receives complaints about the legal profession at his surgery, as I frequently do at mine, and how many he has had from people who feel that they have been let down by a member of the Bar and how many from people who think that they have been let down by solicitors, who will be all that they have if the reforms are passed.

Mr. Devlin: With the greatest respect, the cases that I have seen are roughly half and half, which is sad.

Mr. Cryer: It is a yawning chasm.

Mr. Devlin: It may be unbelievable to hon. Members in various parts of the House, but the fact is that there are complaints about barristers and complaints about solicitors—perhaps more about solicitors. People do not see the present system as delivering the services that they need.

The Lord Chancellor deserves his salary because he sat down and thought carefully about the future of the Bar. He has made the barristers respond. He has made them think out some good reasons for carrying on in the way that they do. It is very interesting to note, in the Bar's response to the Green Papers, that it is now putting forward a plan for a wonderful new scheme under which a barrister will have to take the next brief, regardless of whether it is a legal aid case, provided that it is within his area of speciality. One Left-wing barrister wrote to me saying how welcome that was. When I was at Bar school —not many years ago—I was told that that rule existed already; it was called the cab-rank rule.

It is about time that we looked carefully at our legal profession. The Green Papers have opened a welcome debate, and in that respect by itself the Lord Chancellor merits his salary.

12.12 am

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): May I say to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) that, after 25 years of dealing with constituency cases, I do not pretend to have a statistical breakdown of the grievances against solicitors and the grievances against barristers. However—and in this respect the hon. Gentleman is right —a point of difference occurs to me immediately: most people making complaints against solicitors turn up at my surgery, whereas those making complaints against barristers normally correspond by letter, by courtesy of Her Majesty.

The first two speeches in the debate—those of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) and of the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence)—gave very different perceptions of the Bar. The hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross gave the perspective north of the border. We recognise his particular knowledge and experience there. All that I as a Welshman can say is that I am overjoyed at the thought that a fellow Celt will do a bit better out of the system than perhaps his predecessor managed to do, though both of them seem to be doing pretty well.

I know that the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Burton was intended to be dispassionate and objective. That is why he did not declare an interest. Perhaps it is well that we have a special exemption for lawyers during the next couple of months, because it would take up too much of the time of this House if every lawyer speaking had to declare his interest before getting down to what he wanted to say. There is quite a substantial built-in lobby in the House. However, I watched the departures, and, having heard the hon. and learned Gentleman make his case, and having watched that case gradually disappear, I became increasingly convinced of the irrelevance of barristers in a successful court case. I started off far more sympathetic to the cause that I think the hon. and learned Gentleman was advocating than I was by the time he had finished his advocacy. Indeed, he put forward some rather novel propositions. I had to pass a tissue to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) when the hon. and

learned Gentleman was talking about all the poor barristers who will be homeless. The solicitors will have roofs over their heads, and they can have cars, but the poor barristers will be under the arches.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, in those cardboard boxes.

Mr. Williams: That is right, under the arches, in cardboard boxes.

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point. The point is that, under these Green Paper proposals, the cost of a barrister will rise to pay for overheads—cars, pensions, holidays with pay—so that the cost to consumers will rise. The barristers will be in clover because they will be working for firms of solicitors, with steady, substantial incomes guaranteed against inflation. That is the point. It is much more in our personal interests to have the Green Papers than not to have them, but it is in the interests of the country not to have them.

Mr. Williams: I congratulate the hon. and learned Gentleman on the fact that he managed to convey, in his second presentation of his case, a degree of clarity that he failed to achieve in his first presentation. Indeed, on the first occasion he became so preposterous that he could even envisage a situation in which someone would ask for the assistance of the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross before the courts. I should have thought that that was self-evidently irrelevant, in that such a person could get off on the grounds of diminished responsibility.

The basic proposition of the hon. and learned Member for Burton was strange. He said that the Lord Chancellor should not have an increase in salary because he was upsetting the legal profession. I hope that tomorrow when my hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), always aware of the mood of the House, table a motion that the Secretary of State for Health should have a reduction in salary because he is upsetting the doctors and a motion that the Secretary of State for Education and Science should have a reduction in salary because he is upsetting the teachers the hon. and learned Gentleman will be the third person to sign them.

There will not be an official Division on this issue, but we are an independent-minded party. The Lord Chancellor has been berated by his honourable colleagues because he is trying to attack the restrictive practices in his profession. In the 1970s a commission was set up to look into restrictive practices in the legal profession. It is recorded in the minutes that the secretary of the Law Society came before it and said that all the restrictive practices were in the public interest. Imagine if the National Union of Mineworkers or the Transport and General Workers Union put forward such an outrageous proposition.

The Lord Chancellor deserves some credit for opening up issues that need to be discussed. At least he has opened a public debate, not one in a closed group or for a small select commission. We all have a right and an opportunity to take part. We shall be convinced even further of his genuineness if he now gets rid of another restrictive practice, the strange one that we are debating here tonight.

There seems to be no logic whatever to defend the principle that the Lord Chancellor should have £2,000 more than the head of the judiciary, the Lord Chief Justice. The argument is that it is necessary because he is the head of the legal system. The Prime Minister is head of the Civil Service, yet she receives £21,000 less than the permanent secretary, or the official head of the Civil Service. The Secretary of State for Defence is the ultimate decision-taker for the military services, yet he receives £34,000 less than the Chief of the Defence Staff. Any Secretary of State receives far less than his permanent secretary. Where, then, is the logic?

I remember when I was Minister of State at the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection and the head of my private office was leaving. The morning he was leaving he said, "I have not dared tell you previously, but tomorrow, when I take up my new job as a senior principal, I will be receiving £600 a year more than you are receiving as Minister of State."

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): The hon. Gentleman is right. The Secretary of State for Defence does not lead the troops in battle, but the Lord Chancellor sits as a judge. Is the hon. Gentleman aware of that? He is a judge and assists as a judge in the House of Lords.

Mr. Williams: I do not remember—perhaps the hon. Gentleman will remind me—when the Chief of the Defence Staff has led any troops into battle. The moment that the hon. Gentleman can convince me that that is the case I will concede that he has made a point. It is absurd that the Lord Chancellor receives £37,000 more than the Speaker of the House, who also has responsibilities—within his salary payment—as a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Cryer: Our usual experience of defence chiefs of staff is that they lead their cronies into the board rooms of companies that supply the Ministry of Defence with very large contracts.

Mr. Williams: The fringe benefits are considerable, but one can do even better if one is a failed Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Cryer: There is one coming up now.

Mr. Williams: That is right. There is another one in line. The City of London pays them very well and, indeed, ex-Secretaries of Defence. Lazards could not get its hands on one quickly enough.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: As the hon. Gentleman probably wants an answer to his question, I can tell him that I believe that the last Chief of the Defence Staff to lead his troops into battle was Butcher Cumberland, who did us such harm in Scotland.

Mr. Williams: In that case, I think that the hon. and learned Gentleman will concede that the argument put forward by his hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) hardly has much relevance in today's circumstances.

Several hon. Members have referred to the question of relating the pay to productivity and performance. No one will pretend that there is an easy measure, but let us look at the simple fact that in the past five years—since December 1983—the Lord Chancellor, with this increase, will have received increases in his salary of 56 per cent., 11 per cent. a year. We all know that throughout that time the conditions in our prisons, especially of remand prisoners, have been getting worse and the delays in having cases dealt with have been getting longer.

[Mr. Williams]

Until last year the explanatory note used to contain the following sentence:

"The salary quoted represents a maximum and may not be the actual salary claimed."

In other words, some previous Lord Chancellors did not claim their full salary. I believe that, in the mood of the Lord Chancellor's proposals for a complete review of the restrictive practices within the legal profession, it would be suitable for this Lord Chancellor to say that he, too, would not accept, even though it has been granted—as his predecessors reserved the right to say—the increase until the waiting lists have been eliminated.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 110, Noes 7.

Division No. 152] **[12.22 am**

AYES

Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Latham, Michael
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thurnham, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Widdecombe, Ann

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Howarth and
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Lewis, Terry
McAvoy, Thomas
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Nellist, Dave
Wareing, Robert N.

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skiner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Lord Chancellor's Salary Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 14th March, be approved.

Medicines (Fees and Charges)

12.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I beg to move,

That the draft Medicines (Fixing of Fees Relating to Medicinal Products for Human Use) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 20th March, be approved.

The order is made under section 102 of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1987. Its purpose is to provide the legal basis for making regulations to enable the full costs of the licensing agency to be charged out to the industry through licence and other fees.

To that end the order lists in schedule 1 the functions of Ministers to be taken into account in fixing fees. The schedule refers to the relevant parts of the Medicines Act 1968 that set out the powers and duties in question. Broadly speaking, they cover the licensing functions, including pre-licensing clinical trials, and also post-marketing surveillance, inspection, enforcement, the regulation of advertising and labelling, and the classification of medicines—that is, whether a drug is available only on prescription.

Schedule 2 to the order sets out the matters which can be taken into account in setting fees. The objective is to secure that all the costs of discharging the functions in schedule I can be taken into account in fixing fees. This includes the power to take account of deficits in fee income against expenditure so that a deficit in one year can be recouped in a subsequent year. It is intended that Ministers should also be able to take into account surpluses, so that any excess income can be offset by lower fee income in a subsequent period.

The fees regulations—the Medicines (Fixing of Fees Relating to Medicinal Products for Human Use) Regulations 1989—were laid before the House on 10 March 1989, and are not the subject of debate tonight. They set out the definitions of the various types of licence applications and inspections and the levels of fees which are prescribed. The new fee structure is considerably more complex than the one it replaces. The new range of fees is very wide, from £40,000 for a major new drug application through to £50 for administrative modifications to licences involving no professional assessment. Some new fees have been introduced and some existing fees have been split so as to reflect the different workloads involved in assessing the different types of application.

One major change in the new structure is the abolition of the requirement on companies to pay an annual fee related to turnover. The annual fees have in recent years amounted to about 85 per cent. of the total fee income. We argue that their abolition is necessary because of the Government's view that self-funding public bodies should charge fees that broadly reflect the costs of the services or other activities for which the fee is charged. In the case of annual fees related to turnover, any correlation is regarded as insufficient in a timely sense. That is because the fees are paid over a number of years.

Abolition of the annual fees necessarily means that there has to be a very considerable increase in the application fees to make up the shortfall as well as provide the extra resources necessary to cover the whole rather than two thirds of the costs of the agency. The fee levels proposed are intended also to strengthen the staffing of the agency to enable it better to tackle the heavy workload, including the very considerable backlog in the handling of product licence applications that has built up. The total costs of the agency in 1989-90 are expected to be about £11·5 million.

The new fees set out in the regulations have been the subject of statutory consultations with the industry. The increases in fees proposed are not welcome to some parts of the industry and particularly to the smaller firms. I recognise fully their concerns and understand them. However, I ask them to remember that the increase in application fees is partly the result of the abolition of the annual turnover fees. Looking to the longer term, I believe that the decision that the funding of medicines control should be met by the industry through fees will prove to be strategically the right choice. It provides a basis on which this work can be resourced separately from the rest of the work of the Department.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Can my hon. Friend give the House an assurance that the increase in fees will be met by a commensurate reduction in the waiting time for the processing of applications?

Mr. Freeman: I cannot give that assurance in as direct a form as my hon. Friend would want, simply because there was a substantial increase in the number of applications before the end of the last financial year by companies seeking to take advantage of the lower fees that then prevailed. It will take some time to work through that case load. However, because those applications were being brought forward from this financial year, we anticipate that the level of applications this year will be slightly lower than anticipated, so we shall clear the backlog fast.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the principle of increasing fees to cover the costs involved and increasing fees to cover the costs of a 10 per cent. increase in staff in the Medicines Control Agency should eat into the backlog, about which I am as concerned as he is.

Achieving real improvements in the time taken to deal with licence applications will represent a good investment for the industry. While it inevitably has to put the money up front before better performance can be attained, the new arrangements certainly hold out better prospects than hitherto for delivering improvements. I commend the order to the House.

12.39 am

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I should like to ask the Minister six questions and the first is about the openness in practice. Obviously we welcome the fact that the scale of payments will be made public. Will the accounts of such payments be made available every year in sufficient detail to allow public and parliamentary scrutiny? That would give us the assurance that the new scheme is effective and that the funding is sufficient to allow the proper implementation of the appropriate regulations.

My second question is about what will happen in 1992. If payments fall drastically in that year, following the introduction of unified EEC drug licensing arrangements, and payments go to Brussels rather than to the Medicines Control Agency, will money still be directed to the agency so that it can carry out the essential policing duties that the Minister has mentioned?

Thirdly, it is clearly the intention that the phamaceutical industry will pay for the order and that the changes will

[Ms. Harriet Harman]

save public money. How much does the Minister anticipate will be saved and to what ends will the savings be put? Will they be used for research or will they simply drift back to the Treasury?

Fourthly, it has been said that, because the regulatory agency will be directly financed by the pharmaceutical industry, he who pays the piper will be able to call the tune. Is the Minister satisfied that the agency will be sufficiently independent even though it will be entirely financed by the industry that it is regulating?

Fifthly, will the industry be able to set against profits the payments that it makes to the agency for the purposes of the industry's returns under the pharmaceutical price regulations scheme? The Government are asking the industry to give money to the agency and if they then subsidise the industry for that payment through the mechanism of the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme, I am not sure where that leaves us in terms of saving public money.

My sixth question is about the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme and the savings that the Government intend to make under the indicative drugs budget. As the House will know, there has been much concern among GPs about the savings that the Government intend to make in the indicative drugs budget. Will not whatever marginal savings are made by GPs by paring at the edges of their drugs budget be clawed back by the drug companies through the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme and will not the companies be able to show that their guaranteed level of profit has not been met? Will the Minister say how much he expects to save in the indicative drugs budget? Will there be a net saving or will the saving be clawed back under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme?

12.43 am

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): I speak on behalf of the manufacturers of herbal medicines represented by the Natural Medicines Group to which I am a consultant. I also speak as joint chairman of the parliamentary group for alternative and complementary medicine. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) apologises for not being present for the debate. He is in Europe on parliamentary business and has asked me to say that he supports what I shall say.

The manufacturers of herbal medicines are mostly small companies. They each have many thousands of licensed products which they bring to market, but most of them have a modest turnover. Even the largest herbal manufacturer in the United Kingdom, Weleda (UK) Ltd., employs about 200 people even though it has been growing very fast. Again I declare an interest because that company is in my constituency. Nevertheless, it markets some 5,000 different medical products. It says that the proposed fees are intolerable, and unfair to the smaller manufacturers.

The regulations, as proposed, are not opposed by any responsible manufacturer of herbal products. Such manufacturers support regulation on safety and all other grounds: that is not at stake. They say, however, that the basis of the fixing of fees must be fairer than is at present proposed. One manufacturer says that MLX 175—the proposed scale of fees—represents an increase of between five and eight times the present fee. That is completely unacceptable.

Let me quote from a desperate letter sent by Potter's (Herbal Supplies) Ltd. of Wigan to my hon. Friend the Minister, dated 31 March. It is not the first letter that that company has sent to him.

"your Department has placed before Parliament two vital documents, S.I. 418 and Fees and Charges, both of which will undoubtedly have unprecedented and detrimental effects on smaller pharmaceutical firms—a rise in fees of between five and eight times those paid today proposed in MLX 175 will destroy small businesses . . . It would seem then that as a company that has made safe herbal medicines for over 176 years, the most serious threat to our existence comes from the Department of Health. The effect of these fees on top of the hugely exaggerated requirements of review to new E.C. standards will result in job losses and lack of competitiveness —leaving the U.K. market place for 'green' natural medicines to our European partners.

We hope that as Minister responsible, you will make time to understand our problems by seeing members of our trade organisations before enacting these statutory instruments."

I expressed concern to my hon. Friend on 25 February. He replied most courteously, confirming that a joint consultative group had been set up to administer the proposals. The members of the manufacturing group of the Natural Medicines Group, however, say that they have not been consulted, although the Minister has confirmed that their pleas have been taken into account—or so we are told. If "taking their pleas into account" means imposing increased fees of between five and eight times their existing fees, that is a form of consultation that they do not regard as entirely satisfactory, and I think that the House will agree with them.

The chairman of the largest manufacturer of herbal products in my constituency, Weleda, also wrote to my hon. Friend, on 30 March. The letter reads:

"Whilst I note that in your letter you state that 'the Agency has no wish to close down small companies', I am gravely concerned that the implementation of Statutory Instrument No. 418 will indeed have that effect on Weleda (UK) Ltd. This is because we, as a small company, will be required to pay a greatly increased level of fees for the specialised products we manufacture, which do not have large turnovers.

Closure of Weleda (UK) Ltd. would not only mean the loss of over 100 jobs in a area which has suffered high unemployment, but also, because Weleda is the sole manufacturer in the U.K. of anthroposophical medicines, it would mean that there would no longer be any source of supply of these medicines for doctors, hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and the general public.

I therefore write to ask for your assurance that the regulations as laid down in Statutory Instrument No. 418 are not implemented until there has been further consultation with small, specialised pharmaceutical manufacturing companies such as Weleda (UK) Ltd."

My hon. Friend the Minister has yet to reply to that letter. That is understandable—it is dated 30 March.

The proposed structure of fees is unacceptably unfair. We hope that the quango that has been set up to administer the fees will be properly regulated by my hon. Friend the Minister. I was not re-elected to the House to support a radical Government, whose policies have, on the whole, been aimed at reducing red tape and encouraging enterprise and small business, to find now that we are moving in a reverse direction with these smaller entrepreneurial companies. They appear to be setting up a bureaucratic structure, which perhaps my hon. Friend has not had the time to investigate fully to assure himself that we are doing this the right way. I urge him to have another look at this to make sure that there is not a better way to

organise this that would be fairer to the small manufacturers. They should be consulted and I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to help with those consultations.

It is easy enough for the larger pharmaceutical groups to face these fees. Proportionately, the fees are much smaller for them, so they are quite happy. No doubt they were consulted. They have huge resources, huge profits, far bigger sales and fewer products. The scale of fees is not being based on turnover, as we were originally assured that they would be, so the larger pharmaceutical groups will come out better off than they were. Smaller manufacturers —I am speaking only of the herbal manufacturers, as I do not know about the others—are coming out far worse.

I have a final quote from the Natural Medicines Group, which represents the herbal manufacturers. This letter asks me to make representations on the group's behalf. It says:

"we need to modify this S.I., failure to do so will cause more harm to the herbal industry than almost any other requirement so far. It is of course even more dramatic because many small companies now being asked to increase their payments have also had their most expensive last couple of years, trying to satisfy the unrealistic requirements of review.

As you know, the Natural Medicines Group and its members are dedicated to a sensible licence structure and the public protection that this gives. The result of this 'last straw' in increased fees will result in many products being taken out of licensing and what then for consumer protection?!!"

I urge my hon. Friend to allow further time for consultation, particularly on the way that the fees are to be implemented and their allocations, so that we can devise a fairer system that will allow the smaller manufacturers of pharmaceutical products—again I speak only about those I know—to survive without being so unfairly penalised.

12.53 am

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): The order relates to the "Fixing of Fees Relating the Medicinal Products for Human Uses".

Following the questions asked by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), I have several questions. What human reaction has there been from manufacturers and from the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain? It seems that this is a cost-efficiency exercise, which shows that fees have increased greatly above the rate of inflation. How can that be justified?

I realise that there was some sort of ploy in producing first a licence fee for a new product of £50,000, which was then reduced to £40,000. Was there a reason for taking that course, which was a doubling of the present rate? Surely that is inflationary and something that will add to the drugs budget of the National Health Service.

Perhaps the Minister will explain what is meant by a "variation of licence", which will cost much more than hitherto. I believe that he talked of £50. Will the alteration of a label be classed as a variation? What is meant by a "complex variation licence", which will now cost £1,250? If a product's colour is changed, is that classed as a complex variation? The parent Act and the order are far from clear on these matters and perhaps there should be clarification now.

Is the order not a restraint on innovation? Will a producer stop marketing or not bother to market a product which has only a relatively small sale? I shall be grateful if the Minister will give assurances to meet the issues which I have raised.

Finally, can the Minister not envisage that in the end the losers must again be consumers, to whom the increased licence fee costs will undoubtedly be passed by the manufacturers?

12.56 am

Mr. Freeman: This has been a brief but well-informed debate. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) asked me six questions and I shall try to answer them as briefly as I can. The hon. Lady asked whether reports and accounts would be published. The answer is that they will be published annually. They will cover the fees, costs and performance of the Medicines Control Agency.

The hon. Lady asked what will happen in 1992. Additional responsibilities have been placed on the licensing authority through our membership of the European Community. Under Community rules, there is now provision for companies to apply for product licences under the so-called multi-state procedure. In essence, it requires the member states of the Community to reach a common view on licence applications, though, as yet, any such consensus is not binding on member states which remain sovereign in licensing matters. Participation in European Community work is a growing aspect of the work of the licensing authority and will continue to be so, especially as 1992 approaches. The EEC Commission has not yet published its proposals for the completion of internal markets and medicinal products. Proposals could involve national authorities continuing some licensing activities, and these would continue to be financed by fees. If the EEC proposes taking over licensing on a supranational basis, the Commission will have to include some method of financing. Possibly companies would have to pay fees to new supranational agencies for EEC licences as well as some payment to national authorities.

The hon. Member for Peckham asked me about savings being ploughed back. Income in the past financial year went to the Treasury, and the Department of Health bore on its own votes the expenses of the licensing authority. In this financial year the revenue will come to the Department of Health and offset the expenses of the agency. We expect these sums broadly to match each other. As the fees being charged will be greater than hitherto, because we are increasing the charges to reflect more accurately the costs involved, additional fees will be raised from the pharmaceutical industry. These will amount to about £5 million per annum. This sum will go back into the NHS and improve services for patients and, more broadly, for all those who are provided with some form of service by the NHS.

The hon. Member for Peckham asked me whether the piper would call the tune. The new agency, whose new director—Dr. Keith Jones—was appointed today, will be answerable ultimately to Ministers in the Department of Health and in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is Ministers who determine levels of fees and control the agency.

The hon. Lady asked me whether the licence payments could be set against the profits for pharmaceutical price regulation scheme purposes. The answer is yes; it is a perfectly appropriate revenue expense.

The hon. Lady also asked me about indicative drug budgets. The purpose of our White Paper proposal for indicative drug budgets, which will apply to all general practitioners, is to bring downward pressure to bear on

[Mr. Freeman]

prescribing. It is undoubtedly true that some doctors overprescribe, measured simply against the average rates of prescription for patients. I cannot give the hon. Lady an estimate because we have made none. We aim to eliminate wasteful prescribing; the objective is not to save a specific sum of money.

I appreciate the role that my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) plays in the Natural Medicines Group in his constituency. He raised points about consultation. The order that we are debating is different from the one that sets the fees, and my hon. Friend will have noted that that order was laid before Parliament on 10 March. In December, the Department of Health wrote to every licence holder and we received a substantial number of representations. The fees are being set for one year only and I give my hon. Friend the assurance that we will take into account the experience in the first year. I am not sure that I agree with his estimate of the fees being some five to eight times more than would have applied under the old regime. We are abolishing the annual fee related to turnover and collapsing that fee into the initial up-front fee. In looking at an increase in fees, one must compare apples with apples. There is certainly not a five to eight times increase. There is a joint consultative group which will take representations into account.

I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash with great interest and care. I am prepared at a time convenient to him to meet him and representatives of the Natural Medicines Group to take into account their concerns and fears. I shall get in touch promptly with my hon. Friend to arrange such a meeting, which I hope will be timely.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) asked me about representations received from the industry. We have received 78 replies to our letters which were sent out last December, making 121 apparently representative points. We took them into account in setting the fees laid down in the draft order.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the increases in the rates. Last year and in previous years we were charging or recovering two thirds of the costs of the licensing agency. We now propose to increase that to 100 per cent. and to include in the costs to be recovered a much broader category of costs. We think that that is economic. We shall provide also for recovery of an increase in staff of about 10 per cent. to deal with more applications. The hon. Gentleman asked me a number of other detailed points. I shall read them tomorrow in the *Official Report* and write to him.

I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Medicines (Fixing of Fees Relating to Medicinal Products for Human Use) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 20th March, be approved.

Housing and Planning Act 1986

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

1.3 am

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I apologise for keeping you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and my hon. Friend the Minister up so late tonight, but the subject of the debate arises from a serious problem in my constituency which I understand occurs elsewhere and requires stronger action by Government and local authorities. I have been fortunate in the results achieved by my previous Adjournment debates, and I hope that this debate will prove to be successful in drawing attention to and doing something about this problem. It is ironic that, at a time when everyone is so concerned about amenity and the environment, I should have to raise a matter of deliberate dereliction.

A constituent of mine, Mr. Robert Horrocks, is a property developer. The filed accounts for his companies are not all up to date, but there is no doubt that he must be one of the wealthiest property developers in the country. Through one of his companies, Metrolands Investments Ltd., he controls a shopping precinct in Harwood, which is in most other respects a very pleasant part of my constituency. The precinct was developed 25 years ago by Metrolands, the freehold being owned by the Liverpool Victoria Friendly Society. Development approval was given by the then Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1963 to provide what Metrolands called

"much needed shopping facilities, where these facilities are virtually non-existent."

The precinct opened in 1965, when it was described as "a housewife's dream". At the time of my election in 1983, it contained about 30 different shops as well as a library. Deficiencies in the structure of the building led to disputes between the tenants and the developer. Those disputes became worse after the freehold was sold in January 1984 by the Liverpool Victoria Friendly Society to Metrolands, accompanied by rumours of redevelopment as the new landlord acted in anything but a friendly way to the tenants.

Later that year, residents in the adjacent Lynwood grove came to see me about the rapidly deteriorating state of the precinct and the provocative and high-handed way in which they were being treated about rights of way at the back of their properties, where boards with sticky black paint had been erected.

On 10 August, I sent the first of many letters and telephone calls to Metrolands. I also wrote to the council and the police. I received a reply from the police, but not from Metrolands.

The following year, the condition of the precinct continued to deteriorate. The traders were refused extension of leases, despite the acknowledged lack of alternative premises. Mr. Horrocks ignored my repeated requests for a meeting. I asked the council for its help in setting up a meeting, again with no response from Mr. Horrocks. I wrote to Mr. Horrocks again in May 1986, referring to compulsory purchase of the precinct. He did not reply, but called without notice here at the House on 21 May, when I was in Bolton for mayor making. I wrote yet again to him on 1 October asking to meet, again with

no reply. Later that month, the council granted an application for outline planning permission for redevelopment, with an additional 2,300 sq ft supermarket.

Early in 1987, I received further complaints from shopkeepers who were concerned about the increasingly neglected state of the area. They were also especially concerned about efforts to obtain vacant possession of the shops by the landlord. Notices to quit were being served on traders whose leases had expired. I endeavoured to obtain a meeting with Mr. Horrocks, but yet again with no success. I then arranged a public meeting in April 1987. Over 200 people attended—but not Mr. Horrocks.

As my hon. Friend knows, following that public meeting, I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 14 May, and I quote from that letter:

"Metroland Developments have put in a planning application to redevelop part of the site, but are not prepared to give any assurances to the existing tenants that they can have continuity of trading in the new development, nor are the owners prepared to give any assurances to the community at large that the provision of services such as a post office and a chemist will be able to continue.

Please find enclosed copies of newspaper articles from the Bolton Evening News for the 15th and 16th April which indicate the concern expressed by the people of the town.

I should be grateful if you would see a delegation of Councillors and traders in order to discuss the need for some change in legislation or other assistance in order that the traders themselves can have some assurance for their future livelihood, and the residents some equal assurance about the provision of future services.

Unfortunately, Mr. Horrocks has not been prepared to meet anyone to discuss this issue which has led to demands for a change in the law".

After the general election on 11 June I received a reply from my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) in his capacity as Minister responsible for planning. He declined to see a delegation, maintaining that these were commercial matters rather than land use planning matters and that his Department could not, therefore, intervene.

I was disappointed by his reply, since the commercial arrangements between landlord and tenant in the scheme are clearly not satisfactory. I have a copy of a lease dated 13 August 1968 between Metrolands Investments Ltd. and a tenant of a shop in the scheme. The lease is full of legal obligations binding the tenants. Any transgression threatens retribution. On the other hand, there is no specific obligation on the landlord to maintain the area, only a provision under clause 1 for the tenant to pay an annual service charge towards

"the costs and expenses of maintaining, cleaning and lighting the service roads and pedestrian ways, yards, garden areas and common space included in the Harwood shopping centre."

It is patent that the arrangements for maintenance are implied, but it is equally obvious for all to see that they are not being complied with. For a shopkeeper to take action to prove that the landlord has a legal obligation would be slow and costly, with no certainty of success.

The possibilities of legal and commercial action by the occupiers are tenuous. For neighbouring residents they would seem to be non-existent. Since Metrolands obtained the freehold of the land five years ago, there is now no superior interest to which an appeal could be considered. We have to consider whether any avenues for action are available through the current planning Acts, despite the Minister's claim that land use planning matters are not involved.

A section in the Housing and Planning Act 1986 may be relevant to this case. Section 46 of that Act expands section 65 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. Section 65(1) gives the local planning authority powers to serve a notice on owners and occupiers of land and buildings where it appears that the amenity of an adjoining area is adversely affected by the condition of land in their area.

Such a notice should set out steps for remedying the situation and a time scale for complying with the requirement. I would welcome the Minister's clarification of whether the clause applies to all land within a local authority's overall area or only to land that it owns. If local authorities have power to take action under that legislation, they should do so. If the powers in that section are not wide enough, as Bolton council has previously feared, I urge the Minister to extend them to cover these appalling and unacceptable circumstances. Could he ascertain whether that can be done by order or, if not, by inclusion in the earliest relevant Bill?

If not, can he legislate for improved rights for tenants whenever planning permission for a redevelopment is granted? Should compulsory improvement and purchase powers be extended? Twenty-one years ago, in April 1968, the then Bolton Conservative councillor, Robert Horrocks, said:

"If the voluntary system fails, improvements should be enforced by the making of compulsory improvement orders. This would prevent areas being spoiled by odd houses being allowed to decay."

Late last year, I succeeded in meeting Mr. Horrocks. I appealed to him not to underestimate the strength of local feeling about the state of the precinct, and to pay proper regard to the wishes of tenants and residents. He told me that he was doing all that he could to make progress on the matter.

Unfortunately, my constituents still do not see any sign of progress. After a lone shopper, Mr. Norman Lockton, suffered a severe injury after falling into a large hole which put him off work for seven weeks, the editor of the *Bolton Evening News* published an open letter to Mr. Horrocks, entitled "Precinct Disgrace". He said:

"Derelict, dilapidated and defaced, it is a scandalous monstrosity in one of Bolton's prettiest districts."

In 20 years, the housewife's dream has turned sour. The editor went on to say in his open letter:

"Harwood Precinct these days is a desolate deserted ruin. Premises are boarded up, windows are covered with graffiti. It is gaining an unwanted reputation as a haven for glue sniffers and people are afraid to walk through it at night. If a district such as Harwood is to retain its identity, shops and business must be allowed to prosper. People should be encouraged to shop locally rather than be forced into Bolton. Harwood precinct is at the heart of the community and should be thriving, yet it is being slowly strangled to death."

Constituents gathered to meet me at the precinct last Friday. They impressed on me their disgust that one man could so flout the wishes of the community by preventing shopkeepers from trading in premises for which planning permission had been granted. The most seriously inconvenienced are the elderly and the handicapped, who chose to live near the shops, never dreaming that they would then be forced to shut, leaving no immediate facilities.

I should like to know what Mr. Horrocks would have to say to three of my constituents—Mrs. Cummings, Mrs. Styles and Mrs. Fairbairn. Those three mothers have severely handicapped children and went to live near the shops but they are now in considerable difficulties because

[Mr. Peter Thurnham]

of the lack of shops. What has Mr. Horrocks to say to the 30, 40 or more people who have lost their jobs as a result of the traders being evicted?

Bolton metropolitan college sends parties of building students to see how a building should not be put up. Perhaps students of psychology should go to ponder over why one wealthy man should so wish to hold the community in which he lives to ransom, and students of politics go to see such a glaring example of failure of public policy.

I call on the Government to do all in their power to end this scandalous dereliction, to seek new powers if necessary, and to give local authorities the strongest possible directions.

I call on Mr. Horrocks to end this war of attrition in which he is using his wealth as a battering ram. I appeal to him to remember his own words as a councillor 20 years ago which I have just quoted, and to heed the words of the Prime Minister in May 1979:

"The Britain I want is a land which cares for the weak, the old and the sick."

Perhaps he might then gain the respect which he fought for, and lost, in the House of Lords 15 years ago.

Must the Government stand by while developers taint their gains with the suffering of the weak, and say that it is just a private matter between landlord and tenants? Is this what the Government gave approval for in 1963? The Minister may say that this is just a little local problem, but that is not how my constituents see it.

1.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) is an assiduous campaigner on behalf of his constituents and I am aware that his success in securing Adjournment debates and action as a result of those debates has been the subject of recent well-deserved favourable comment in the *Bolton Evening News*. In that context, I congratulate him on once again achieving an Adjournment debate and on raising a subject that is of concern to many of his constituents.

For reasons which I know my hon. Friend appreciates, I am unable to discuss the details of this particular case. But what I can do is to set out generally the powers which exist under both section 46 of the Housing and Planning Act 1986 and the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, part II.

Section 46 of the 1986 Act is the subject of the debate. Section 46 was merely a vehicle for substituting a new version of section 65 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. The latter is the substantive provision and I shall therefore refer to that, rather than to section 46.

Section 65 of the 1971 Act enables local planning authorities to secure the tidying-up of land which is adversely affecting the amenity of a neighbourhood by serving a notice on the owner and occupier obliging them to

"remedy the condition of the land".

Such provisions have their origin in Acts of local application and have been incorporated in general legislation since the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. The intention has always been to enable authorities to deal with unsightly, small plots of open land—seriously overgrown gardens, vacant plots, fly tips and perhaps sprawling scrap yards and the like.

The wording of the provision was widened in 1986 to overcome difficulties in enforcement, but this did not affect the basic intention that the provisions were to be used in respect of small, untidy plots of land and a circular on the 1986 Act explained that the changes had been made in response to difficulties experienced in enforcing notices served under the previous powers; and expressed confidence that authorities would continue to use the powers with discretion, as a means of dealing with relatively isolated, severe cases of neglected or unsightly land.

There are two particular features of section 65 and its supplementary provisions which I should mention. First, the law requires notices to be served on both the owner and the occupier of the land; and secondly there are grounds for appeal to a magistrate's court against a section 65 notice, including the ground that the condition of the land is attributable to, and such as results in the ordinary course of events from, the carrying on of operations or use of land which is not in contravention of planning control. In other words, it provides a protection for the reasonable effects of activities or land uses which have planning permission, whether expressly granted or deemed. That is in accord with the respect which planning law generally accords to existing and established users.

Central Government have never monitored the extent to which local authorities have used these provisions. Given the limited scope of the provisions, there has been no need to do so. We are not talking about large sites of strategic importance, and the tidying up of gardens or small vacant plots has properly been considered a matter of purely local significance.

It is entirely for local authorities to decide where and when to use the powers of section 65. It is not for me to say whether those powers have any relevance to the situation which my hon. Friend has described. If my hon. Friend wishes to pursue the possible use of section 65 powers he should approach the local authority.

Representations made in the context of a current departmental review of derelict land policy have suggested that a new power might be introduced to allow local authorities to improve or reclaim derelict land themselves and to charge the owner. Such a change would amount to a strengthening and wider use of authorities' existing powers to take action themselves in default of compliance with a section 65 order. The idea will be considered, along with other ideas which have come forward, in the derelict land review.

We will need to bear in mind, however, that a power limited to clearing up situations other than those reasonably resulting from activities covered by planning permission would be little different from authorities' existing default powers in relation to section 65 orders; and a power which extended to clearing up the reasonable incidential effects of activities with planning permission would obviously impinge on the long-held respect of planning law for existing users. Such a power would therefore need very strong justification.

It may also assist my hon. Friend if I explain that my Department is responsible for the policy on landlord and tenant business lettings. The main legislation concerning the rights and obligations of business landlords and tenants is set out in part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act

1954. Under the 1954 Act, business tenants have security of tenure and a right to apply for a new tenancy. Unless the tenant has failed to pay the rent, or broken some other condition of tenancy, the landlord can bring the tenancy to an end at or after the end of the current tenancy only if he is entitled to possession of the property. The Act specifies a limited number of grounds for entitlement to possession; these include demolition, reconstruction and redevelopment.

In addition, under the Act, special forms and strict time limits apply if the landlord wishes to seek to end the tenancy. The tenant has the right to request a new tenancy from the landlord and, thereafter, to apply to the court, using special forms and following the time limits laid down by the Act. If the landlord can satisfy the court that he is entitled to possession on one or more of the specified grounds under that Act, the court must grant him possession. If he cannot do so, the court must order a new tenancy for the tenant.

Having listened to my hon. Friend's comments, I have the impression that it is around enforcement and implementation of the provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Act that much of this dispute arises. The landlord wishes to obtain possession so that he can undertake redevelopment. From what my hon. Friend says, it appears that some, or all, of the tenants either are holding out for new tenancies, because they do not believe that there will be development, or wish to remain where they are for other reasons. In the meantime, with some of the tenancies terminated, there are a number of boarded-up properties and general deterioration in the environment.

But I have to say to my hon. Friend that that happens when a large number of tenancies are reaching the end of their period, and the landlord seeks repossession for purposes of redevelopment. It happens in particular when tenancies do not all expire on the same day so that the landlord takes possession over a period.

My hon. Friend may be familiar with what is happening in Horseferry road at present. I refer to Great Westminster house, where a number of shops have been closing down over a period of several months. That is an example of the effect of the Landlord and Tenant Act in practice. If my hon. Friend is asking us to change that Act to provide a different balance between tenants' interests and landlords' interests, I have to disappoint him. As recently as 1985 we carried out a review of the working of the Act, with particular reference to small business men—both landlords and tenants—and we concluded, after wide consultation, that the Act continues to work well, protecting both tenant interests and landlord interests, and maintaining the balance between landlord rights and tenant rights enshrined in the Act.

If, as it appears from what my hon. Friend is saying, this is largely a dispute over the terms and conditions of tenancies, that must be a matter between the landlord and his tenants. If the tenancy agreement does not contain sufficient provision to protect the quality of the environment until the expiry of the tenancy, that is unsatisfactory. It is not something that the Government can become involved in. It is for the individual landlord and the tenant to negotiate.

I hear what my hon. Friend says about the state of affairs that pertain in this particular part of Bolton. I sympathise with him and his constituents, but I cannot offer any Government solution. I know that my hon. Friend believes that, if there is a problem, the Government should be able to solve it, but I must disappoint him. This is a private contractual problem, not one which the Government can solve.

I am sure that my hon. Friend's speech will have brought this issue to the attention of a larger audience in Bolton. If Mr. Horrocks is not listening to the debate today, he will certainly hear of it. It may well result in pressure being put on him, as my hon. Friend wishes. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this issue, but I have to disappoint him in saying that the Government cannot solve this problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Tees (Newport) Bridge Bill *[Lords]*
Read a Second time and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Gulf Operations

1. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels are currently deployed in the Gulf; and what impact this has on their availability for other duties.

5. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels are currently deployed in the Gulf; and what impact this has on their availability for other duties.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): There are currently three Royal Navy ships and one Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel deployed in the area of the Gulf. The Royal Navy's commitment in the Gulf inevitably limits the availability of ships for other tasks. All the vessels could, however, be recalled in support of NATO in the event of an emergency.

Miss Lestor: Does the Minister agree that the time is approaching when we should consider reducing our military presence in the Gulf? As the Iran-Iraq war is over and the risks to commercial shipping have been considerably lessened, the reduction would not simply be a goodwill gesture—which I believe is needed—but would release Royal Navy vessels for other areas where they might be required.

Mr. Hamilton: I remind the hon. Lady that no treaty has been signed to end that war. We believe that it would be inappropriate to begin to withdraw our commitment before that happens. However, these matters are constantly kept under review.

Mr. Garrett: Will the Minister convey my thanks to all the personnel who served in the Gulf during that extremely difficult period? Will he assure the House that the vessels will be fully repaired and maintained when they are pulled back to the United Kingdom? Some of the Fleet Auxiliaries will be ready for major refits. When will the contract for HMS Southampton be announced?

Mr. Hamilton: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman when the contract for HMS Southampton will be announced. However, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement is looking at that matter very closely. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about the role of the Royal Navy in the Gulf. The Royal Navy did sterling work, which was much appreciated by everyone. We must bear in mind that the Royal Navy escorted more ships than all the other navies in the area put together.

Mr. Mates: Contrary to what the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) suggested, will my hon. Friend the Minister please ensure that our presence in the Gulf—it has been in the area now for nine years, it has been unobtrusive and highly professional and it has acted well in the cause of preserving the peace—is not allowed to fall below the level which my hon. Friend considers necessary?

Mr. Hamilton: I can give my hon. Friend that commitment. It is very important that we maintain a presence in the Gulf for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should maintain a presence there because we owe it to all those who gave their lives in north Africa and in the middle east in the defence of the oil supplies so that the United Kingdom could continue the war against Hitler? Our presence in the Gulf and in north Africa was necessary then and it would be quite wrong now, just because there happens to be a temporary cessation of hostilities in the area, to reduce that essential presence which safeguards the traffic routes.

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We want to see significantly greater reductions in the tension in the area. It would be good if a peace treaty could be arrived at between Iran and Iraq and the area made more secure than it is today. I understand my hon. Friend's point about the sacrifices that people made in the past to ensure that the oil flowed.

Mr. Tony Banks: What information has the Minister about the number of ships which have re-flagged to take advantage of the protection provided by the Armilla patrol? Is it not now time to ask the owners or nations from which those ships originally re-flagged to pay a contribution? Why should the British taxpayer have to pay for other ships to be escorted through the Gulf?

Mr. Hamilton: In general terms, we believe that the patrol has made a valuable contribution to the security of the area. Although there was a degree of re-flagging, we cannot ask for contributions from nations. We have made an important contribution to the security of the area.

Chemical Weapons

2. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department is making to the Geneva negotiations on a chemical weapons convention.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. George Younger): The negotiation of a comprehensive, global and effectively verifiable ban on chemical weapons is a major Government and NATO arms control priority. As the House knows, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary takes the lead on this and other arms control negotiations. However, my Department contributes in a number of ways to the Geneva negotiations.

particularly through the provision of military, technical and scientific advice both in Geneva and, by close liaison with the Foreign Office in London.

Mr. Moss: Is not my right hon. Friend as puzzled as I am that in all the time that the Russians recently spent in Britain they never once sought to refute the allegations, widely carried in the British press, that their stockpile of chemical weapons is some 10 times the size that they claim? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is about time that there was a little more glasnost from the Soviet Union with regard to its chemical weapon capability?

Mr. Younger: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. As I think my hon. Friend will know, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised that issue last week with Mr. Gorbachev and took the opportunity to emphasise our commitment to a global and verifiable ban. However, Mr. Gorbachev produced no further information on that matter.

Mr. Robertson: Does the Secretary of State think that the Government's position is helped by the fact that increasing evidence—some of which has been verified by his Department—of the use of chemical weapons by Iraq against its own Kurdish civilian population is being greeted in the United Kingdom not by proper condemnation but by a doubling of trade credit to Iraq?

Mr. Younger: I cannot confirm what the hon. Gentleman says, but some evidence has been put about of the use of chemical weapons on the Kurdish minority by Iraq. We would regard that as a serious matter because chemical weapons are undesirable in all circumstances.

Mr. Brazier: Did Mr. Gorbachev, in his welcome discussions here, offer to open up to international inspection those parts of the Soviet Union's chemical weapons supply which were not opened up to us as promised during our last visit to the Soviet Union?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point but I am afraid that no such offer has been made. As it is a long time since Britain possessed any chemical weapons, it is disappointing that in the new climate of openness which is supposed to exist there does not yet seem to be openness on the subject of chemical weapons, which we believe should be banned on a world-wide basis.

Fylingdales Early Warning Station

3. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreement there is with the United States of America about sharing early warning information from Fylingdales early warning station and ensuring it can be used independently by the United Kingdom Government.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The ballistic missile early warning system at Fylingdales is under RAF command and control. Early warning information from the system is disseminated in parallel to the United Kingdom and United States authorities for their own use without restriction.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that the United States has done all the modernisation? Is he confident that the United States would pass on information to the British Government if the British Government were contemplating using Trident in some way of which the United States did not approve? Surely if we are to have a credible deterrent of our own we should have our own early warning system and not be dependent on the Americans who might not pass on the information. Or is all that now irrelevant? Have we a guarantee from the Soviet Union that if it intends to launch any missiles at us it will ring up and tell us?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is working on the wrong assumption. We share the information that comes from Fylingdales. We receive it in parallel, so there is no question of one nation having it and giving it to the other, or vice versa. The costs of modernisation are also being shared. The United States will be paying for the radar and we shall be paying for the infrastructure that goes with it. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the RAF operates Fylingdales early warning station, so we can ensure that we obtain information from it—and we do.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Does my hon. Friend accept that the question is flawed because the international early warning system, in which Fylingdales plays so important a part, is based on the principle of mutual corroboration? Will he take this opportunity to send to the men and women who have worked throughout the past 25 years at RAF Fylingdales, which I had the pleasure of visiting recently, his congratulations on the expertise and professionalism with which they conduct their task?

Mr. Hamilton: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend and I will pass on his message of congratulation on a job extremely well done.

Belgian Defence Minister

4. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the Belgian Defence Minister; and what matters will be discussed.

9. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the Belgian Defence Minister; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Younger: I met Mr. Coeme yesterday. We discussed a range of subjects of mutual defence interest.

Mrs. Fyfe: As the Belgian Government do not share the British Government's obsession with modernising nuclear weapons, can the Secretary of State tell us whether they are starry-eyed idealists or dupes of Moscow?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Lady is not correct in her assumption. It was made perfectly clear to me that the Belgian Government entirely subscribe to NATO's deterrent strategy. They also fully agree that weapons systems must be kept up to date. They are also strongly against any idea of a third zero in shorter-range weapons.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that when he next meets his Belgian counterpart he will be able to say that the United Kingdom—in concert, one hopes, with the other NORTHAG partner, the Dutch—has either agreed a defined specification for a new light attack helicopter or has procured the Apache AH64, as NORTHAG badly needs improved anti-armour capability and as the Belgians have recently procured about 50 Agusta 109 utility helicopters?

Mr. Younger: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point, but that subject was not raised either by me or by Mr. Coeme

in our discussions yesterday. The Belgian air force has a number of collaborative projects with NATO, particularly in respect of training.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: In view of the Belgian Government's well-publicised attitude, is not a consequence of enforced modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons at this time likely to be a weakening of the North Atlantic Alliance which may possibly result in Federal Germany being driven towards neutralism? What account of those risks do the Government take in their policy on that issue?

Mr. Younger: Those matters must all be carefully discussed and taken into account before any decisions are reached on keeping up to date the weapons that NATO has. It is worth remembering that the Soviet Union has itself modernised at least 95 per cent. of its shorter-range weapons in recent years. We must be careful not to leave it with an incovenanted advantage.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: As the Belgians are taking over the presidency of the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union from us, when my right hon. Friend next meets the Belgian Defence Minister will he try to build on the excellent out-of-area co-operation that we saw in the Gulf so that we have some sort of set plan if anything similar occurs in the future?

Mr. Younger: Yes, that matter was covered in the Western European Union ministerial meeting last week, when it was decided that the operations jointly undertaken in the Gulf were extremely successful and a good example of the way in which European nations can co-operate. We shall bear in mind that a similar form of organisation might be available in future needs for out-of-area activities.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Secretary of State confirm that at the forthcoming NATO summit, the Belgian Government will not support the early modernisation of short-range weapons and will not contribute to any process by which a signal could be given to the American Congress that a replacement for Lance would be the unanimous wish of NATO?

Mr. Younger: That matter was certainly not covered in my discussions yesterday. It is for the Belgian Government to explain their own attitude. I understand that the Belgian Prime Minister is doing that in the Belgian Parliament today. I think that he had better do that himself, in his own language. As to Belgium's position in the Alliance, the hon. Gentleman will know that Belgium has been a very sound ally in NATO and totally subscribes to NATO's policy of nuclear deterrence based on nuclear weapons.

Anti-armour Weapon Systems

6. **Mr. Greg Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what anti-armour weapon systems are available to the British Army of the Rhine.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): The British Army of the Rhine has a balance of anti-armour systems which includes Challenger and Chieftain main battle tanks; Lynx helicopters armed with TOW missiles; Swingfire and Milan missiles; infantry anti-tank weapons; and mines.

Mr. Knight: Does my hon. Friend agree that, despite the proposed cuts in Warsaw pact conventional forces, its capability for sudden, large-scale offensive operations remains strong? That being so, are not the British Government absolutely right in maintaining a mix of anti-armour weapons systems, including tanks and helicopters, to meet this ever-present threat?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend is right. It has long been a feature of the Warsaw pact forces that they have a large predominance of assault and rapid attack forces, particularly main battle tanks. My hon. Friend is right to say that our assessments conclude that the right way to counter tanks is with a balance of anti-armour weapons.

Mr. Duffy: Will the Minister confirm that there is concern in the British Army of the Rhine about its ability to defend itself against Warsaw pact tanks? Will he also confirm that there are even greater symmetries on both sides in anti-tank weapons than in tanks, and that there is an impressive improvement in Soviet tank technology? Does he agree that the answer may lie not so much in more weapons in any of the categories that he mentioned but in smarter ones? What is the present position on Trigat development?

Mr. Sainsbury: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that not only are the latest Soviet battle tanks highly capable, and have explosive-reactive armour, but there has been a pattern over the years of new and improved Soviet main battle tanks arriving at regular intervals. At the moment we assess that our current equipment can match the present threat, and we have invested in a number of improvements which are under way, including—as the hon. Gentleman rightly identifies—medium-range and long-range Trigat, which will play an important part in future anti-tank battle.

Sir Jim Spicer: Will my hon. Friend explain why both the United States and the German armed forces give a much higher priority to the use of helicopters in an anti-tank role than we do within our Rhine army?

Mr. Sainsbury: My hon. Friend will be aware that we are currently assessing and keeping closely under review the role of the helicopter in anti-tank battle. Some of our NATO allies, for reasons of their own, decide to give more predominance to helicopters. This is an important subject and one that we are keeping closely under review.

Conventional Forces

7. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on conventional forces since 1978-79.

Mr. Younger: Up to the end of the financial year 1987-88, some £20 billion more had been spent, in real terms, on conventional forces than if spending had continued at 1978-79 levels. This figure takes into account GDP inflation during the intervening period and excludes the costs of both the Falklands garrison and nuclear strategic forces.

Mr. Tredinnick: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that 95 per cent. of the increase in defence spending since 1978-79 has gone towards conventional forces? Will he give some examples of how this additional money for conventional forces has been spent?

Mr. Younger: I agree with my hon. Friend that the figure represents an enormous increase in the resources provided by the Government for conventional weapons, and has enabled us to provide resources, including 64 new ships, seven regiments of Challenger tanks and more than 500 new aircraft for the RAF.

Mr. Benn: Is it not a plain fact that the present level of defence expenditure in this country, the United States and the Soviet Union is far beyond that which is either necessary or possible for those countries to bear? Is it not clear that when Mr. Gorbachev says he wants to disarm, the reason why people believe him is because he also says that he wants to raise the standard of living of the Soviet people, which is what they want? There is now a much greater awareness in Britain that the present level of defence expenditure is starving the Health Service, education, the housing programme and other public services of the funds that they so urgently need.

Mr. Younger: There cannot be anything more urgent than ensuring that the country is safe and the people protected. However, as the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) will fully realise, if he thinks about it, thanks to the Government's policies and NATO, we are now able to negotiate reductions in weapons with the Soviet Union from a position of safety without imperilling our own security. The right hon. Gentleman should be pleased about that.

Sir Antony Buck: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the figures that he announced should put an end to suggestions that conventional armed forces have been starved of funds because of our deployment of Trident and other nuclear weapons?

Mr. Younger: My hon. and learned Friend is correct. As I have said all along, the Trident programme is not only necessary but extremely good value for money. We have managed not only to achieve that but to make an enormous increase in the provision of conventional weapons at the same time.

Mr. James Lamond: Surely the Secretary of State heard President Gorbachev spell out once again at the Guildhall last Friday the unilateral reductions that Russia is making in conventional forces and call on the rest of the world to do the same. As an excellent opportunity arose in the talks following the Vienna agreement, should not the Secretary of State, instead of boasting about excessive expenditure, be taking positive initiatives to ensure that we help the world to achieve lasting peace?

Mr. Younger: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is a little behind the times. Mr. Gorbachev spelt out some of his proposed reductions, which we warmly welcome, but he did not mention that while he has been talking about reductions we have been making them. We have reduced our nuclear warheads in Europe by over one third in the past 10 years, which is the other side of the equation that the hon. Gentleman should ponder.

Sir Dudley Smith: Despite what has been said recently, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a big difference between the conventional forces of the Warsaw pact and those of NATO and a total imbalance in chemical weapons?

Mr. Younger: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a large difference. Even supposing that the Soviet Union had completed all the reductions that it has proposed but not yet effected, there would still be an enormous disparity against the West in tanks, guns and aircraft. None of the figures produced last week were able to counter that.

Mr. Rogers: The Secretary of State wants the penny and the bun. First, he boasted of how much more the Government were spending on defence, but then he said "Look how much we have reduced expenditure." He cannot have it both ways. Without boasting of the achievements of the Labour Government, is it not true that many of the decisions that resulted in the present level of conventional spending were taken in 1978 by Lord Mulley and that, contrary to what the Secretary of State would have the House believe, spending on conventional defence expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product is declining and is forecast to do so in the White Paper?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman will know better than I precisely what decisions the previous Labour Government took, but it is clear that they did not provide the resources to carry them through. This Government, because of a much increased gross domestic product, have been able to provide extra money, which has enabled our forces not only to be properly paid but to have modern, new equipment, which they were denied by the cuts made by the Labour Administration.

Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve

10. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last had discussions with the chief of general staff regarding recruiting levels in the Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve, and the co-operation of employers in releasing employees for training.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Michael Neubert): Consultation on recruitment and employer support, as with other matters relating to the Territorial Army, is a continuous process through the formal Ministry of Defence committee structure and normal official channels. As regards employer support, we launched a major campaign last year, recommended by the national employer liaison committee, and I am pleased to say that the response thus far has been very encouraging, with more than 500 companies pledging their firm support to the reserve forces.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the Territorial associations are being allocated adequate resources to support and sustain the successful campaign that he mentioned? Does he agree that the so-called demographic trough makes it especially important to maintain effective follow-up with employers for volunteers?

Mr. Neubert: Yes, I can confirm that there is full Government commitment to the financing of our present Territorial strength and, in particular, the number of man training days planned. As I said, we are very encouraged at the response from employers, because the 500 companies already signed up represent 30 per cent. of the national private sector work force, and when this is

combined with the home Civil Service and the Scottish Office, it represents a substantial sector of employment. We intend to pursue this policy and to tackle smaller firms and professional partnerships as well.

Mr. Ron Brown: Will the Minister agree that, if money is to be spent effectively, members of the Territorial Army have a right to form trade unions, or is that extending democracy too far?

Mr. Neubert: I have to respond that that is not part of our tradition, and long may it remain so.

Mr. Conway: Does my hon. Friend agree that important aspects of retention in the Territorial Army include not just the very generous level of bounty and payment, but the opportunities to train with Regular units and to partake in exercises which, more often than not, are with the British Army of the Rhine rather than Salisbury plain or Otterburn training area?

Mr. Neubert: My hon. Friend experiences that opportunity and takes full advantage of it. It is a fact that the Territorials are equipped, as are the Regulars, for their role, and this means that they have the most modern equipment and are constantly kept in the forefront of our battle plans.

RAF Bruggen

11. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit Royal Air Force Bruggen.

Mr. Younger: I last visited RAF Bruggen in 1986 and I have no plans to visit the station again in the near future.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Minister seeking to replace the free-fall nuclear WE177 bomb, which is used on Tornado aircraft from RAF Bruggen, and will the replacement be capable of use in areas of central Europe, where the use of nuclear weapons is now restricted by the INF agreement?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman is slightly misconceiving the INF agreement, which outlaws a certain type of missile—a land-based missile with a range of over 500 km—anywhere in the world. It does not, unfortunately, control where such missiles, should they exist, would land. The replacement of the free-fall bombs will be necessary by the mid-1990s, because the present weapons systems will have become out of date and unsuitable for use.

Mr. Mans: Will my right hon. Friend agree with me that it is necessary to replace these free-fall weapons not only because the present generation will have become out of date, but because the Russians have a similar weapon and we need one to maintain our deterrent effect into the next century with the Tornado aircraft?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. The Soviet Union is equipping itself with air-launched air-to-ground missiles. It is also worth reminding the House that over the past five years the Russians have modernised 95 per cent. of their shorter-range missiles, including SS21s, Scud launchers and Frog 7 launchers. They have all been modernised in the Warsaw pact, and that is something we must therefore take account of.

Deep Battle Concept

12. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made as to whether the Soviet Union is abandoning its concept of the deep battle.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the last two years Soviet statements have claimed that its military doctrine is now of an exclusively defensive nature. Although we welcome such statements, it should not be forgotten that the Soviets still retain the capability to conduct operations deep into NATO territory and to launch a surprise attack.

Mr. Hague: Will my hon. Friend agree that the conclusion to be drawn from his answer is that, however welcome the latest proposed reductions in Soviet armed forces may be, the forces of NATO must continue to be fully prepared and fully modernised? Can he tell us anything of how radical the changes in Warsaw pact organisation, doctrine and equipment would have to be for it to be said that the pact had changed from an offensive to a defensive military posture?

Mr. Hamilton: There would of course have to be major structural changes in the deployment of Soviet forces and their training would have to change as well. So it would mean a complete change throughout the whole of the Soviet military structure.

Mr. Cryer: Is this word "modernisation" not jargon for cheating on the INF agreement? Will not the 133 non-nuclear nations who were signatories to the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty change their minds about not deploying or manufacturing nuclear weapons if the United Kingdom starts to cheat in an atmosphere of mutual peace and force reductions generated by the Soviet Union? Would that not be a very dangerous step, and will the Government stop cheating and think again?

Mr. Hamilton: There is no question of the United Kingdom cheating on the INF treaty. The problems of the non-proliferation treaty have been with us for some time. We suspect that there are countries that are deploying the nuclear capability. That is regrettable.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Russian forces, particularly the naval forces, are changing their tactics and that the British armed forces need to respond? Has there been a major review of Royal Navy equipment and tactics, particularly as the Soviet Union has decided to keep its naval forces deployed in a defensive rather than in a blue sea role?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend must be careful. The fact that the Soviets may be exercising their naval forces rather less than they did in the past may be for reasons of economy. It does not mean that they are reducing their capability, which is what we must judge them by.

Mr. Sean Hughes: In view of the Minister's answers, will he do the House the courtesy of answering the question that the Secretary of State refused to answer at the last defence Question Time? Do the Government take seriously the threat of a Warsaw pact short-range nuclear attack on NATO's fixed assets in Germany?

Mr. Hamilton: The Government take seriously and place importance on a flexible response. We believe that we should have modern and up-to-date weapons to respond over a whole range of different capabilities.

US Defence Secretary

13. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to meet the Secretary of Defence of the United States of America to discuss matters of mutual interest.

16. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to meet his new United States of America counterpart; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Younger: I hope to meet Mr. Cheney at the meeting of NATO's nuclear planning group in Brussels next week to discuss a range of matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Douglas: May I respectfully ask the Secretary of State to raise with Mr. Cheney the incident relating to the Soviet submarine at the weekend? Is there not a need to reach an international agreement and understanding, particularly among those powers that have nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered submarines, that there should be disclosure about what happens to such vessels when an accident or an incident takes place? Is it not essential that vessels of this type should not fall into the hands of people like Gaddafi? Is it not essential that no power should sell to such people vessels of that type, which could be extremely dangerous to the peace of the world?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman makes some valid points. Any accident of that kind, whoever is the owner of the ship in question, must cause us all the gravest concern. I note what the hon. Gentleman has said and I shall discuss the matter with Mr. Cheney when I meet him.

Mr. Patnick: Will my right hon. Friend discuss with the United States Defence Secretary the United States commitment to and support of NATO?

Mr. Younger: In a general review of NATO's affairs with Mr. Cheney, I expect to cover these matters generally. I am sure that Mr. Cheney will be able to confirm that the new Administration—like, indeed, all previous Administrations—are firm believers in the effectiveness of NATO as an organisation that is entirely defensive and aims to reduce armaments from a position of strength.

Mr. Cohen: Does the Secretary of State recall telling the House last July that no decisions had been made on NATO force modernisation? Why is it, then, that six weeks previously the United States started work on its new design facilities at RAF Upper Heyford to take new F111s? Will the Secretary of State discuss with the United States Defence Secretary why he is misleading the House?

Mr. Younger: The hon. Gentleman is not correct. No decisions have been taken on the modernisation of any NATO facilities of that kind. Any alternations or improvements that the United States wishes to make to its bases in this country will first have to receive the British Government's permission. Therefore, I deny both the hon. Gentleman's points.

Sir Peter Emery: When my right hon. Friend meets Mr. Cheney and the other Defence Ministers, will he refer them to the speech made by Mr. Tindemans, the Belgian Foreign Minister, at the joint NATO meeting organised by ambassador Abshire, at which a number of hon. Members were present when Mr. Tindemans made it absolutely clear that the Belgian Government would want to support the modernisation of all weapons, nuclear and otherwise, within the NATO armoury?

Mr. Younger: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding the House about that. The Belgian Government, like all the other members of the Western European Union, have subscribed to the platform of the Western European Union, which clearly commits the whole Alliance to a strategy based on nuclear deterrence.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Secretary of State reflect on his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) about the construction changes which are to take place at Upper Heyford? Will he look at the military construction appropriations report for 1990 which was presented to the House of Representatives of the United States, because it contains references to major constructions at Upper Heyford as a consequence of a decision to deploy additional aircraft to that site? Will he consider that question and put his reply on record in the Library or write to me or my hon. Friend and correct us, because we seem to be going wrong? It appears that the United States Congress is spending money on something which the Secretary of State seems to know nothing about.

Mr. Younger: Of course I shall consider what the hon. Gentleman has said and write to him, but I stress that the question is whether works are taking place as a result of NATO decisions on modernisation. There have been no such decisions; therefore, that is a clear answer to a clear question.

Mr. Rathbone: On a different aspect of possible co-operation, will my right hon. Friend find out in his discussions whether there is room for initiatives by Britain and the United States in offering military assistance to countries in south America which have to fight the war against the drug barons, to help them restore law and order to their own countries?

Mr. Younger: I note what my hon. Friend says. It is not our policy to detach any forces for operations in south America, but we would always be prepared to discuss with our allies any way we could help in the battle against drugs.

NATO

14. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and what subjects he intends to discuss.

Mr. Younger: I expect to see Dr. Woerner at next week's meeting of NATO's nuclear planning group in Brussels. We shall discuss a range of subjects of mutual interest.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his informative reply. Will he be discussing the SRAM-T missile and whether the Government intend to fit it to NATO aircraft and ultimately to the European fighter aircraft? Is he aware that General Ronald Yates in evidence to a congressional sub-committee indicated that the missile was designed to restore capability lost by the

INF treaty? Do the Government accept that restoration is necessary and will Britain play its part in that? Does he consider it justified, given the credit that the Government have tried to take for being party to the INF treaty?

Mr. Younger: I do not expect to discuss that issue with Dr. Woerner when I meet him next week, but I should make it absolutely clear once again that the INF treaty applies to ground-based intermediate-range missiles. We fully support that treaty which adopted NATO's proposals. There is no question of our wishing to go back on that treaty in any respect, but we have to maintain for our future defence a range of options that we could use if we were threatened with an attack which we could contain by no other means, and in that we are supported by the entire NATO Alliance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As the proportion of Soviet GDP spent on defence has increased in recent years, does my right hon. Friend agree that NATO's defence policy must be predicated on what the Soviets do and not what they say?

Mr. Younger: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We must look quite realistically at the capabilities of the countries concerned, and we must equip ourselves to defend ourselves in all foreseeable circumstances. Expressions of increase or decrease on the Soviet defence budget are not worth very much until we know the level of that budget.

Mr. Wilson: When the Secretary of State meets the Secretary General of NATO will he discuss the targeting policy for nuclear weapons for the duration of the Queen's visit to Moscow? Does he agree that there would be a certain irony in extending the hand of friendship on one side and, on the other side, threatening the use, implied or real, of nuclear weapons?

Mr. Younger: I do not think there is any likelihood of my discussing with Dr. Woerner any aspects of nuclear targeting during the Queen's visit to Moscow.

Defence Policy (Scottish Representations)

15. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Scotland on defence policy since 11 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I have received no representations from Scotland specifically on defence policy, although I do, of course, receive a large volume of correspondence on various defence issues from all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Porter: Does my right hon. Friend realise that on that day, at the Labour party conference in Scotland, pronouncements were made advocating unilateralism?

Mr. Younger: Yes, I did observe that at a Labour party conference in Perth on that date—[HON. MEMBERS: "It was Inverness."]—resolutions were passed urging that the review of policy—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us hear the answer.

Mr. Younger: At that conference, resolutions were passed urging that following the review of policy that has taken place in the party, it adhere to unilateralism in all its features. It occurred to me to wonder whether the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) supported that, or agreed with it.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings today.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Prime Minister tell my 79-year-old, blind constituent, Mr. William Bradley, whether she thinks that it is fair that on 1 April 1988 his income was £52·55, that on 1 April 1989 it was £52·55, and that on 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1991 it will be £52·55? If she thinks that that is fair, would she care to justify it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member is taking a particular case which, I assume from what he says, was the subject of transitional protection, so that when the whole system was simplified and improved, and a lot more money was spent on it, people were protected from having a reduction in their cash. The hon. Gentleman takes a particular case in which there will be no real increase. May I, therefore, take credit for the fact that 98 per cent. of all pensioners will receive a cash increase with the coming uprating?

Q2. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to comment on the National Health Service White Paper proposals on doctors' budgets? Will she confirm that the proposals are entirely voluntary, helpful guidelines to be available to those who want them, rather than cash limits imposed on those who do not?

The Prime Minister: Yes, whether or not a doctor wishes to hold his own budget, provided that he is within the eligible group, is a decision for him to take. The fact that some doctors do not wish to do it should not deny others the right to do it if they want. I noticed in a recent article in the *New Statesman and Society* a report of one doctor from the Royal College of General Practitioners saying:

> "Why should general practitioners resign over a plan which embodies so much of what the Royal College has been working for over the years?"

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister think that all senior civil servants who make Government leaks should be prosecuted?

The Prime Minister: Prosecution is not a matter for me, as the right hon. Gentleman knows.

Mr. Kinnock: From that answer by the Head of Government may I take it that she has decided to give a public interest defence to Mr. Powell and Mr. Ingham?

The Prime Minister: No I have nothing further to add —*[Interruption.]*—nothing further to add to the many answers given in statements, speeches and replies to questions. I notice that the right hon. Gentleman has nothing real to complain about.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: During her busy day will my right hon. Friend find time to join me in congratulating my distinguished constituent, Nick Faldo, on his outstanding achievement on winning the American Masters? That, together with the equally important result achieved by Sandy Lyle last year, has illustrated that this country leads the world in golf.

The Prime Minister: I gladly congratulate Nick Faldo on this year's result. It was a very exciting tournament and a very exciting play-off. It was one of the best things that we have seen on television for a long time.

Dr. Owen: Given that the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union wants to renegotiate the terms and conditions under which the abolition of the dock labour scheme could go ahead, will the Prime Minister confirm that she would be ready—if such negotiations produced changes in the terms and given that the mineworkers' redundancy terms are much more generous —to amend the legislation as it goes through the House?

The Prime Minister: No. We believe that the restrictive practices contained in the present dock labour scheme are highly damaging to the prosperity of ports and highly damaging of the prospects of this country in 1992. There is only one thing to do and that is to abolish the scheme; then those ports that suffer under it at present will have the chance to become as prosperous as those ports that do not belong to it. The redundancy terms, at up to £35,000 for redundant dockers, are generous.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the grave concern among family practitioners about some of the proposals regarding the new way in which they would work under their contracts? Will she listen to their representations and recognise that for family practitioners the key dimension in the end is care for the sick?

The Prime Minister: Obviously the changes in the National Health Service White Paper and in the accompanying detailed documents are meant to improve the service to the patient. I notice again from an article in the *New Statesman and Society* that it says:

"The white paper is neither anti-socialist nor anti-NHS . . . the gain for patients will be immeasurable".

I believe that my hon. Friend is referring to the contract arrangements which pre-dated the White Paper. With regard to the matters in the detailed consultation papers they are, of course, for consultation. They are not meant to be a specific blueprint and we will, of course, consider representations.

Q3. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fields: Will the Prime Minister tell the House whether it was she who gave permission to MI5 and mercenaries to bug telephones, private and public, in Scotland, to bug meetings of Labour politicians and to bug their telephones in Liverpool, to infiltrate and bug meetings of opponents to nuclear power in other parts of the country and to tap the telephones of foreign politicians? If she did not do it, who gave permission? What is her link with David Coughlan and when can we expect criminal proceedings to commence against those people engaged in illegal activities?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would care to look up the legislation passed in this House which governs telephone interception. That legislation is followed meticulously and an annual report is made upon it.

Sir William Shelton: Is my right hon. Friend aware that on Good Friday seven of my Conservative councillors in Lambeth found their houses daubed with death threats? On Sunday last three of those seven received threats by telephone to kill them and to burn down their, expletive deleted, houses. Will she condemn such outrageous extremist political action and urge the police to increase surveillance and activity so as to apprehend those wretches as soon as they can?

The Prime Minister: The events which my hon. Friend describes are utterly disgraceful and totally contrary to democracy. I shall, of course, do as my hon. Friend says, and I hope that anyone who has information will not hesitate to give it to the police to see that such behaviour is stopped and, if need be, the people who perpetrated it are brought before the courts.

Q4. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Maclennan: Would the Prime Minister be prepared to consider the proposal made by Nobel prize winner Professor Abdus Salam at the Edinburgh science festival on Saturday that an international science centre should be established in Caithness drawing on the resources of that community to provide facilities for advanced scientists coming from the Third world to developed countries?

The Prime Minister: I saw a proposal for an international science centre in Edinburgh. I did not see one for Caithness. For a feasibility study to be conducted into any proposal for an international science centre—I think that such a proposal has been put forward by Edinburgh district council—an application for money should be made to the Scottish Development Agency for its consideration. No such formal request has yet been made to that agency. The hon. Gentleman—or anybody from Edinburgh—should first go to the SDA.

Q5. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Baldry: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the whole House welcomes the progress that was made in Anglo-Soviet relations last week, not least those of us who were fortunate enough to be among the last Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to the Soviet Union? But does my right hon. Friend agree that Mr. Gorbachev's comments about modernising NATO's short-range nuclear weapons were somewhat cynical having regard to

what the Soviet Union has been doing with its short-range nuclear weapons in the last five years? Does she agree that the concession on uranium and plutonium could better be put into context?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. We estimate that about 95 per cent. of Soviet short-range nuclear missile systems in the forward area have been modernised or replaced in the last five years and that some 200 SS21 missiles have been introduced since 1981. By contrast, NATO's Lance missile was introduced in 1972 and therefore needs modernisation. As for uranium and plutonium, as I have said, the Soviet Union has very substantial stockpiles and of course weapons grade uranium and plutonium do not deteriorate. The closure of three plutonium production reactors would leave four others still in operation.

Mr. Loyden: Will the Prime Minister say why, following a most peaceful period in the docks industry, with ports such as Liverpool being in profit, she should cause a political strike? Is it because we have a bloody-minded Minister, a bloody-minded Cabinet and a bloody-minded Prime Minister who are prepared to take political action to achieve an industrial end?

The Prime Minister: No. The Minister, Ministers, the Government and the Prime Minister are concerned that all our docks should be working at maximum efficiency and prosperity and that those who are in the hinterlands to docks should have the chance of attracting inward investment, just as have those who are in the hinterlands to non-scheme docks. It will be much better and we should be able, when all the ports are working well and economically, to attract a lot of business from the European docklands to this country. Many fishermen who are having difficulty getting their fish landed will welcome our decision.

Q6. **Mr. Aitken:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Aitken: Will my right hon. Friend soon find time to introduce some major improvements to the highly unsatisfactory methods by which the House continues to scrutinise EEC legislation? Does she agree that it is wrong that an important EC directive such as the one on broadcasting which will be ratified next week, could not be debated in the House? However, perhaps because of lack of scrutiny, that directive has been supported by Home Office Ministers who agreed even to a statutory right of reply being introduced for the European media. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that her Government will now support the same principle by giving a fair wind to the private Member's Right of Reply Bill when it comes back to the House on Friday?

The Prime Minister: I shall attempt to answer the multiple parts of my hon. Friend's question. It is important to have the best possible scrutiny of draft directives before they are debated in the House, especially with the number of them now coming forward, the effect that they will have on our lives and the tendency of the Commission to put far too much detail in them. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Lord President has put some suggestions to the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee for improving the scrutiny that should take place. I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the broadcasting directive. He asked about the private Member's Right of Reply Bill. Of course that is a matter for private Members. Whatever view is taken, it indicates that there is great concern about some of the things that we see in the press today. We may not have the right answer, but we cannot ignore the concern.

North Cormorant Platform

3.33 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of the leak of 50,000 gallons of drilling mud from Shell's North Cormorant platform 100 miles north east of Shetland?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I understand from inquiries made by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland that about 1,140 barrels of oil-based drilling mud were accidentally discharged into the sea yesterday afternoon from the North Cormorant oil and gas production platform. The accident occurred during transfer of the mud from a supply vessel to a holding tank on board the platform. It is believed that there was a mechanical failure in a drainage pipe from one of the holding tanks which led to the leakage of mud about 100 m below the surface of the sea.

The drilling mud contained about 60 per cent. of refined oil. It is expected that the released mud has fallen to the sea bed close to the installation. The spilled mud contained about 680 barrels of oil. The tanks on board the platform were emptied yesterday afternoon, immediately following discovery of the leakage. No further spillage has occurred.

The information received as a result of inquiries indicated that the effect on the environment is minimal. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy and I will be seeking a report on the source and impact of the spillage from the responsible authorities and the operators as soon as possible. Furthermore, we have asked Shell to report to us immediately if there is any evidence at all of any adverse environmental impact.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the Minister for his detailed reply. I am sure that he will reassure the House that if Shell report, any sightings of adverse environmental impact immediate action will be taken. Does he agree that, given the present sensitivity about pollution, not least from oil-related installations, merely to look at incidents individually is to miss the whole point that further consideration should be given to an overall examination of the environmental implications of North sea oil developments?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is yes. In answer to the second part, I should make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that in the wake of the Alaska episode my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy asked for an update on how we deal with oil spillages in United Kingdom continental waters. That process is already under way, and if improvements are needed they will be made. Exercises on a considerable scale take place annually and are carried out by the marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport. The last major one was on 4 July last year, and a smaller exercise was carried out in Humberside on 7 March.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): First, will my hon. Friend confirm that Shell acts very responsibly in relation to matters such as pollution, and indeed safety and other matters? Will he assure the House that he is getting all possible co-operation from the company, as I am sure he is? Secondly, will he confirm that, if a major pollution problem should arise, there are adequate resources in the area to deal with it, as evidenced by the fact that companies in Aberdeen have been called upon to assist in clearing up pollution in Alaska?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: With regard to my right hon. Friend's first point, I have had a meeting with a representative from Shell, and I agree with what my right hon. Friend said. The other matter will certainly be followed up with the relevant Departments and we shall do everything in our power to ensure inter-departmental co-operation to effect this very important purpose.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The Minister is being characteristically vague about who is to provide this very important information. When he refers to responsible authorities in the company, does he mean that the Government will be relying almost entirely on the company for further information? Ought he not to be insisting that all Government resources be commanded immediately to inspect the area, continue to monitor and to take positive action with urgency to prevent the pollution having any effect on the marine environment?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We received information from Shell in the first instance, but I assure the hon. Member that we will check monitoring and that under surveys are carried out by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries scientists in this matter. It is the responsibility of the operator—in this case Shell—to monitor the oil content of discharges of mud or cuttings around each platform under the powers exercised by the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is impossible to eliminate either human or mechanical accidents in any sphere whatsoever and that therefore, as long as we extract oil from the sea and transport it in ships, there will be a risk? The important thing is that we have the resources available to deal with the possible results of that risk. It would seem certain that we do in this case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We want to reduce risk to an absolute minimum and do everything humanly possible to achieve that purpose. As for safety issues generally, which my hon. Friend touched on indirectly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy is responsible. As my hon. Friend knows, Lord Cullen is now conducting the Piper Alpha public inquiry and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has made it clear that if he makes any recommendations for improvement of the safety regime they will be adopted.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Following the point made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), does not the Minister consider that there is a difficulty in that all the information that he has given us today has come from the company? When will the independent investigation take place? Does he not consider that there is a real difficulty in that we do not have a system of regulation in the North sea; we have in effect a system of self-regulation?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Preliminary investigations indicated that isolation of the mud storage tank on the platform failed and that involved the valve and cement plug, we believe, allowing the mud to discharge into the sea

through one of the platform legs about 100 m below sea level. The mud contained approximately 680 barrels of oil out of 1,140 barrels and this sank to the sea bed. There is no visible sign of a slick on the surface. Admittedly, conditions are not particularly good, but I can give the hon. Member the assurance that there will be monitoring as necessary by the appropriate authorities.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Can my hon. Friend reassure the House that in the review dependence on dispersants will be looked into very carefully, as much of that technology comes from the oil companies which manufacture the dispersants and there are serious misgivings that that means of dealing with a major oil spill will fail, as it has failed in Alaska?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Energy has asked for an update on how to deal with oil spillages so as to get the most up-to-date advanced technical and technological information to enable us to deal with these matters appropriately in all circumstances.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister stop muttering platitudes about monitoring and updates and acknowledge that it is fairly common practice for unwanted material to find its way over the sides of oil rigs? Is there not an urgent need for effective action by Government Departments to control this practice?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Strong penalties exist. If it is shown, for example, that a discharge is due to want of reasonable care, the operator is liable to penalties under the Prevention of Oil Pollution Act 1986 of up to £50,000 on summary conviction or an unlimited amount or imprisonment on indictment. If the hon. Gentleman has evidence of misdeeds in the sea outside his constituency he should report them as appropriate.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I note what the Minister has said, and I recognise that there is no surface slick and that the mud has sunk to the sea bed within the 500 m exclusion zone, but surely he accepts that any unintended discharge of as much as 50,000 United States gallons of oil-based mud—even if it is of low toxicity—is a matter for genuine concern, and that the House and the country would expect monitoring to be very tight and extended.

The Minister referred to the circumstances of the discharge. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that the supply vessel, the Edda Fram, started pumping into the storage tank at 1130 hrs yesterday and it was only at 1500 hours, a considerable time later, that someone noticed that the contents of the storage tank were dropping and not rising. That suggests that at least there was something wrong with the surveillance system. In effect, they were pumping through an empty discharge drain straight into the sea for three to four hours before those operating the system became aware that something was wrong. Does not that suggest that there was something wrong with the inspection system and that there is food for thought for the Department?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes. The hon. Gentleman touches on a relevant point. It was at 11.30 am that the supply vessel commenced pumping and it was at 3 pm that those responsible became concerned that stocks were not building up as expected, exactly as the hon. Gentleman has said. It is important that we should find out exactly why the isolation system failed. Shell is making immediate inquiries and both the Scottish Office and the Department of Energy expect to be kept closely informed. I agree with the points that the hon. Gentleman made.

Points of Order

3.41 pm

Mr. Tom Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Arising out of the Prime Minister's answer to the Leader of the Opposition, can you give us guidance about ministerial responsibility? Of course, the Prime Minister is quite right in saying that she is not responsible for prosecutions. But is she not head of the Civil Service? Therefore, are not questions about the behaviour not only of the most senior civil servants but her own intimate personal civil servants, working for her, like Mr. Charles Powell, matters for the Prime Minister?

Mr. Speaker: It is certain that they are not matters for me.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is about the contempt in which the House is being held by the Secretary of State for Transport. I understand that at this very moment he is making an announcement at the Department of Transport about the Carlisle-Settle railway line. I welcome the decision to keep the line open, under the control of British Rail, which proves to be a defeat for British Rail who wanted to close the line, and a defeat for the Government, who wanted to privatise it. If we look at *Hansard,* we see that announcements about the Carlisle-Settle line have been made on the Floor of the House and hon. Members could question the Minister on them. Will you, Mr. Speaker, adjourn the House and bring the Minister from his press conference to the Despatch Box to answer the questions that many of us would like to put to him?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The matter is worse than has been outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) because there appears to have been a deliberate conspiracy to avoid accountability to the House.

The question on page 3084 of today's Order Paper for written answer was handed in only yesterday. I understand that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) issued a statement this morning commenting on the reply to that question. That suggests that some information has been circulated exclusively among Conservative Members about a matter which has been the subject of several debates and more than 30 petitions from all parts of the United Kingdom and from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

When the Secretary of State for Transport said last year that he was minded to close the line, he made a statement to the House following Transport Questions. He deliberately picked out two questions which he could refer to at the end of Question Time through the usual arrangement. This railway is of great interest to many people and many hon. Members have referred to it in oral and written questions. It is monstrously outrageous that we should be denied the right to question the arrangements which the Secretary of State has entered into. I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, deprecate such a shoddy conspiracy by the Government.

Mr. Speaker: I was unaware that any statement was being made outside the House. The House well knows that I feel very strongly that statements should first be made in the House.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. I am still speaking.

Today is an Opposition day and it could well be—although I have no knowledge of this—that arrangements have been discussed through the usual channels about this matter to protect the day's business.

Mr. Snape: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Having listened to the exchanges, and bearing in mind your ruling, it seems that two points arise directly. First, the Secretary of State for Transport held a press conference that was scheduled to start at 3.30 pm. Perhaps you can look into this, Mr. Speaker. Is it not unprecedented, that the Secretary of State is so punch-drunk that he is too terrified to come to the House to announce good news, let alone bad news?

Mr. Speaker: I have never travelled on the line, but I hope that it is good news. I have heard a lot about it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. This morning the Select Committee on Procedure held a press conference at 11 o'clock and precisely this abuse of the House was raised in justification of those who seek to frustrate our procedures. If you were to rule that this practice was improper, Ministers would act accordingly and change their practices. When we were asked at the press conference to justify what has been happening, this type of example was raised. The matter is in your hands, Mr. Speaker, and you can resolve it.

Mr. Speaker: It is not in my hands. The House is aware that I am not responsible for organising the business. However, it may well be that an Opposition day is not considered to be an appropriate day to make a statement. I frequently receive representations from hon. Members who complain about not being called because a statement was made on a day when the Opposition had chosen the subject for debate. It is a question of balance. I do not organise the business.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that you would agree that one of the roles of the House of Commons, certainly a role of the Opposition, is to identify where abuse and misconduct have occurred and to raise such matters on the Floor of the House. Yesterday I raised a question with the Attorney-General. I do not question your decision, Mr. Speaker, because you must decide these matters. However, yesterday, with regard to his role in the Westland affair, you said that the Attorney-General should not reply because it was not relevant to the question on the Order Paper. As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister gave a very evasive reply.

If we know that there was deception, lying and dishonesty over the Westland affair, certainly by Mr. Ingham and Mr. Powell, how can we raise the issue on the Floor of the House? When such deception, dishonesty and outright lies occurred in January 1986 over the Westland affair, why are we silenced and not allowed to raise the matter?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will be the first to appreciate, because he has been a Member for a long time

and is very experienced, that if he looks at yesterday's *Hansard* his question had no relevance to the main question on the Order Paper.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Further to those points of order, Mr. Speaker. The two points of order relate to each other. You must have gathered by now the profound frustration that is beginning to be felt in the House at the way in which Ministers feel able to ignore the normal conventions and responsibilities. My hon. Friends the Members for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) have just outlined one matter which, on previous occasions, has led you to say that Ministers should make statements in the House rather than outside. However, your advice is continually ignored. In that respect, Mr. Speaker, what do you intend to do to assert the rights of the House?

That matter relates to the first point of order that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). When does the House have the right to investigate and question the Executive? That power can be operated only if Ministers are not allowed to stand at the Dispatch Box and blatantly say that a matter is not their responsibility when clearly it is. As protector of the rights of the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker, how do you intend in future to ensure that where officials of the Prime Minister, the Head of the Civil Service, have created a major constitutional abuse, the House has the right of interrogation that the Prime Minister and her Ministers are attempting to deny it?

Mr. Speaker: I am surprised that the deputy shadow Leader of the House should put a question in those terms to the Chair. He knows perfectly well that it is not the role of the Chair to organise the business. Furthermore, he is part of the management, through the usual channels of the House. Today is a Supply day and he could have chosen that topic for debate had he wished. It is for the Opposition to choose the subject for debate—he has those opportunities. I am not responsible for what is said from the Dispatch Box, provided that it is in order.

I have deprecated more than enough the fact that statements are made outside the House. I should always prefer statements to be made in the House before they are made to the press, but, equally, the right hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that that is likely to impinge on Opposition time. That would undoubtedly have been the case today if there had been a statement. These are not matters for me but for the management of the House.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some of us in the Chamber this afternoon are hoping to listen to the debate on pensions. I am becoming concerned that the Labour party intends to continue making bogus points of order until 10 pm in order to disguise its appalling record on that subject when in government and to disguise the weakness of its policies today. I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will put a stop to all this nonsense and let us get on with the debate.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As one of the privileges of the House is that we can attend and vote safely, will you use your good offices to ensure that hon. Members who are hurrying from Norman Shaw and crossing Palace Yard do not suffer the fate that almost befell me of being mowed down by a Government car speeding in through the narrow entrances, a matter which I raised with the relevant Minister at the Department of the Environment last night? When the Division bell goes, one accepts that Ministers and Government cars have to come in, but someone should tell them about speed limits because there is a serious danger to hon. Members and the staff of the House who could well be injured by motor cars whose drivers do not know how to drive and who appear to be in an unnecessary hurry.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman gives me further details of that incident, I shall have it looked into.

European Community Documents

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 4092/89 relating to pesticide residues be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Building Societies (Money Transmission Services) Order 1989 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

Counting Women's Unremunerated Work

3.54 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require Government departments and other public bodies to include in the production of statistics relating to the gross domestic product and other accounts a calculation of the unremunerated contribution of women; and to include this calculation in the gross national product.

The Bill requires the Government to quantify the unremunerated work of women and to include that quantification in the gross national product. In order to explain the need for the Bill and the gross injustices that it will redress, I shall put before the House facts about the economy that women—particularly the poorest women —have been wanting to give right hon. and hon. Members for many a day.

When I was 16 my parents sent me to secretarial college to learn shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping and business studies. All over the walls of that building, in large letters, was the slogan "Time is money". Although that time is money is an accepted and obvious economic fact, everywhere in society women's time is squandered as if it were worthless. Today few shops will even say whether goods will be delivered in the morning or the afternoon. The same is true when equipment needs repairing and of meter readings and gas, electric and telephone connections or disconnections. Women's waiting time is expected to be at everyone's disposal.

The daily queues at supermarket checkouts grow on Saturday when women, many of whom have been out to waged work all week, have to plough through their housework on their so-called day off. Of course, those time-wasting queues lower staff costs. Clearly time is money—but it seems that it is women's time that ensures that other people, especially the captains of commerce and industry, make money.

Much of the work that women do is unremunerated and never enters the GNP, as that quantifies only goods and services exchanged for money. However, that unremunerated work, while it is not counted, is certainly counted on. The Government, in closing hospitals and many institutions that provided health care and other services, claim that they will be replaced by community care. However, it is not the community in general that does the caring but women who shoulder the extra burden of time-consuming, back-breaking and emotionally exhausting work for which the Government are refusing to pay. That shift from waged to unwaged caring is not quantified in official statistics, so no one knows just how much money women are saving the Government by picking up the pieces of the shattered welfare state. Again, women's unpaid work is counted upon but not counted.

Most women in waged jobs find themselves at the bottom of the pyramid. They are particularly exploited when they take on part-time work in order to have time for family responsibilities. Even those few women who secure well-paid jobs find that, once they become mothers, their lives too are shaped by the task of bringing up their children—the future labour force—and of caring for others whose work is considered more important than almost everything that women do, whether the women are professionals, cardboard box makers, or are fully occupied at home.

The work of women that is included in the GNP is based on a pedestal of unremunerated, uncounted work. Imagine how much work and responsibility falls on the women in the families of British Rail employees who in a recent accident inquiry revealed that they work a 12-hour day, seven days a week. There is not much chance of those men helping with the housework; all the burden falls on their wives.

It is almost always women who care for those who are ill or who have disabilities. As so-called farmers' wives, they tend kitchen gardens and livestock. They are market traders, shop attendants and bookkeepers in family businesses. They are often secretaries, typists and hostesses, as well as being wives and a status symbol for their professional husbands. It is women who ensure that the flowers are on the church altar and that schools have parent-teacher associations as well as volunteers to make up for education cuts by running jumble sales, mixing paints and coaching young readers.

Women visit ailing relatives and neighbours, especially when meals-on-wheels no longer roll up. Women work overtime to shield families and whole communities from the effects of racism and racist immigration controls, class prejudice, polluted food, water and air, and the economic, physical and emotional devastation of unemployment. None of this skilled, time-consuming life-giving but unwaged work of women is counted in the GNP.

The fact that women are statistically invisible as producers and service providers means that some economists have the cheek to label as marginal these workers without whose vital work society would grind to a halt. The failure to count women's unremunerated work in the gross national product results in a distorted picture of the economy and leads to faulty economic planning, which does not meet the needs of working people. The very same work enters national statistics when performed by those who are paid for their work, such as nannies, nurses, bookkeepers, housekeepers, agricultural workers, physiotherapists, chauffeurs, chefs, interior decorators—the list is almost endless. Endless too are the damaging effects of the monetary and statistical invisibility of the work of housewives. The fact that this work is unwaged and uncounted devalues women's waged work, too.

The many organisational, technical and other practical skills that women develop as housewives gain them little in the waged labour market. One exception to that involves the National Union of Teachers, which was my union for many years. The NUT gained one year's increment for every three years that women spent at home with their own children. This was recognition for some of the work of mothers who return to teaching. However, most of the time the housework women do either full or part-time—before they go to work work in the morning, after they return home at night and at weekends—is not considered work. Only when this unwaged work of women is officially quantified by widening the compass of the GNP will we even begin to know how much time and skill goes into the economy and the production of specific commodities.

I therefore present this Bill, which requires Government Departments and other public bodies to include in the statistics relating to the gross domestic product and other accounts the quantification of the unremunerated work of women—in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy—and to include that calculation in the gross national product.

There is growing international awareness of the need for recognition of the totality of women's contribution to the economy. According to the United Nations, women carry out two thirds of the world's work for 10 per cent. of the income, and own only 1 per cent. of the assets. In July 1985, the United Kingdom Government were represented at the United Nations world conference in Nairobi, Kenya and agreed "Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women", the final document of the Decade for Women. Paragraph 120—amended by delegates from Sierra Leone, Jordan and Uganda, along the lines put forward by the international wages for housework campaign—committed Governments to include women's unremunerated work in the GNP. The following November, paragraph 120 was singled out as one of the most important decisions of the Decade for Women and ratified by the United Nations General Assembly. My Bill would implement that decision.

Despite their enormous contribution, women are undervalued because so much of their work is unvalued and economically invisible. That has enabled the Government to get away with cutting maternity grants and freezing child benefit—the only money which many women can call their own. Adding up this work makes the unanswerable case that these benefits are rights for work done, not charities.

Economic invisibility keeps older women dependent on their husband's goodwill because, despite a lifetime of serving family and community, there are no pension contributions for unwaged housework. Many a divorced wife lives to see her ex-husband retire from the position which she helped him to obtain on a good pension, while her income is reduced to a bare minimum. The economic invisibility of most women's work has allowed the Government to inch nearer to workfare—the American version of the workhouse—which forces claimants into dead-end jobs to earn their entitlement to income support.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has now been speaking for 10 minutes and should begin to draw her remarks to a close.

Ms. Gordon: Counting women's work would prove that every mother is a working mother and that some of them have two or even three jobs. Counting women's work would make women count by making clear that every woman, whether or not she does waged work, is nevertheless a working woman.

Perhaps the most unjust policy that economic invisibility has permitted is the poll tax, which is levelled at women who have no income. Despite women's enormous contribution, the Government are demanding more. These women will become institutionalised and further dependent on the goodwill of the wage earner. They will be institutionalised into an inferior, vulnerable and archaic position which will invite domestic violence. Women on income support, including mothers, will have 20 per cent. of the poll tax deducted from the household's survival money.

When all the work that women do is finally made visible in the GNP and other official statistics, no one will be able to continue to ignore the extent of dependence of the mighty institutions of the state, industry, commerce and every social organisation throughout the United Kingdom on women's voluntary and involuntary unwaged work.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Mildred Gordon, Mr. Tony Banks, Mr. John Battle, Mr. Tony Benn, Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, Mr. Eric S. Heffer, Mr. John Hughes, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Ms. Marjorie Mowlam, Ms. Joyce Quin, Mr. Dennis Skinner and Mr. Nigel Spearing.

Counting Women's Unremunerated Work

Ms. Mildred Gordon accordingly presented a Bill to require Government departments and other public bodies to include in the production of statistics relating to the gross domestic product and other accounts a calculation of the unremunerated contribution of women; and to include this calculation in the gross national product: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 April and to be printed. [Bill 114.]

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY])

Uprating of Pensions and Other Benefits

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the first Opposition motion, on the uprating of pensions and other benefits. I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Given that we are starting rather later than I had hoped, I ask Front-Bench spokesmen and Back Benchers to make short contributions.

4.7 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That this House notes that this week pensions and other benefits are increased by 5·9 per cent. at a time when prices are rising by 7·9 per cent. and earnings by 9 per cent.; further notes that if the pension had been uprated since 1979 in line with earnings, under the formula introduced by the Labour Government, a married couple would this week be receiving an additional £17·55 p; records its deep concern at the plight of over half a million pensioners and other claimants who this week do not receive a single penny in uprating; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to extend the full uprating to all pensioners and claimants.

I read daily that preparations are under way to commemorate in May the 10th anniversary of the Prime Minister's election, when she will exceed the time limit that Mr. Gorbachev has thought it prudent to impose as a maximum period for which any elected official can hold senior office in the Soviet Union—a prudent measure to prevent the abuse of power.

Six weeks later, on 13 June, we shall celebrate another 10th anniversary. On that date in 1979, the then Secretary of State for Social Security, who has now been translated to another place, announced to the House that pensions would no longer rise in line with earnings but would be pegged only to prices. That is not quite how he put it. He said that that was the minimum that the Government would do to the pension. If the right hon. Gentleman had been mean with the money, he was generous with the promises. He said:

"I should like to make it clear, however, that it remains the Government's firm intention that pensioners and other long-term beneficiaries can confidently look forward to sharing in the increased standards of living of the country as a whole."—[*Official Report*, 13 June 1979; Vol. 968, c.439.]

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): A pack of lies.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) characteristically commits the Government to rigorous scrutiny. I hope that he will forgive my saying that I am sure that the then Secretary of State meant every word he said. The sad thing is that the Government of which he was a member did not keep a single word of that pledge. Not once in the past decade have pensioners on the basic pension shared in the increased standards of living of the country as a whole. Every year under this Government they have been short-changed.

I wish to be scrupulously fair: it is not the case that pensioners have had no share in the increased living standards of the country. That would be unfair; they have been given a 2 per cent. share. That is the precise amount by which the basic pension has gone up in real terms under this Government, while over the same period average earnings have gone up by 24 per cent.

I heard the Minister for Social Security interviewed on the radio on Sunday, when he entertained me by saying that he was looking forward to this debate with relish in order to contrast the record of his Government with the record of the last Labour Government. There certainly is a contrast. In 10 years this Government have increased the basic pension by 2 per cent.; in five years the last Labour Government increased the basic pension by 20 per cent. in real terms. If that is the contrast the Minister relishes, I give him 10 out of 10 for bravado but one out of 10 for prudence.

Of course, the Secretary of State and the Minister have a well-worn alibi. I have not the slightest doubt that they have been rehearsing it all morning at the Department in front of the mirror to make it sound more convincing. The alibi runs thus: the basic pension does not matter all that much; what matters is the growth in pensioners' total income.

What makes that alibi so breathtaking, so bald that it would take away the breath of any honest jury, is that it rests on a system which this Government inherited from the last Labour Government. On 13 December the Under-Secretary of State, in a reply to a parliamentary question from me, confirmed that the largest single contribution to the growth in real incomes of pensioners was from the state earnings-related pension, designed by the last Labour Government, which has provided two fifths of the increase for which the Government claim credit. The irony is, of course, that the Government have spent the last four years doing the best they can to undermine SERPS and to make sure it does not make the same contribution in the next decade.

It is possible to measure how much the pensioner has been short-changed over the past decade by supposing that the statement made 10 years ago had not been made and that the pension had been uprated in line with earnings, as it would have been under the formula inherited from Labour. A married couple would this week have been receiving £17·55 more than they will get in their pension book this Friday. That is big money. It is very big money to those living on a pension. Yesterday I unveiled what a pensioner might get in a shopping basket for that money. It included a fresh chicken for a Sunday roast; half a dozen oranges, a source of fresh fruit; a packet of tea bags; a jar of instant coffee—even that is now a luxury to many pensioners; a pair of tights; a couple of bars of soap; a cheap brand of talcum powder; two stamps towards the TV licence. The really depressing feature about every item on that list is that nothing there is not likely to disappear within a week in a household of two. Without that extra income, all those items disappear from the weekly budget of that couple.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose*——

Mr. Cook: If I can just finish this point I will certainly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The result is that that couple is left with a constant conjuring trick to make ends meet. This was perfectly expressed with complete understatement by Age Concern, Scotland, which said:

"Age Concern Scotland staff know of one elderly man who budgets by buying one big item every week. One week the big item is the washing up liquid, the next week toilet rolls. A loss of a couple of pounds per week for someone with this kind of budget is drastic."

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Does he not agree that pensioners have also benefited under this Government from income from savings, which has gone up dramatically; from the real increases in occupational pensions; and, for the poorest one fifth, from the substantial increase in income support and related payments, particularly for the elderly pensioner, which Conservative Members welcome and which far outstrips anything done in the 1970s?

Mr. Cook: Of course there have been increases. There have been increases in occupational pensions and, given that the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 was passed by the last Labour Government, we would expect that increase. If the hon. Gentleman looks up the figures, he will find that the bottom quarter of pensioners receive an average of £3·50 a week in occupational pensions. The second bottom quarter received an average of £10·50 a week in occupational pensions. Most of the income of the great majority of pensioners in Britain comes from their basic pension.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that if pensioners had received this week the pension increases that they ought to have received they would even have been able to afford a pair of the special long johns from Harrods that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) suggested, when she was a Minister, they ought to wear to keep warm in winter?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend will have to wait until we receive the Department of Trade and Industry report to find out whether it will be possible for pensioners to obtain access to Harrods.

It is possible to measure the short change and the extent to which the Secretary of State had the money to provide extra for pensioners. If he had wanted to do so this year, he certainly had the money. Any doubt that he had the money is removed by a glance at the Government Actuary's report on the national insurance fund. In the financial year that ended last week, the Government expect to make a surplus of contributions over benefits of £2·5 billion. That, alone, is enough to treble this week's increase in the state pension. Nor is that an aberration under this Government. It is an inevitable consequence of benefits increasing in line with prices, although national insurance contributions increase in line with earnings. The Government have become so accustomed to running a surplus on the national insurance fund that the cumulative surplus has almost doubled during the last three years. By April 1990 it will stand at over £10 billion.

To put that staggering sum in terms to which Conservative Members can relate, it is big enough to pay for the Trident submarine programme. There is some reason to fear that that is probably what it is doing. Rather than pass on the benefit of the surpluses to pensioners by way of increased benefits, the Treasury is siphoning them out of the fund for its own use by reducing the Treasury supplement. This financial year—for the first time, I believe, since 1948—not a penny will be paid into the national insurance fund by the Treasury. Contributors are being conned, by accepting deductions from their wages in good faith, that they are paying for benefits to pensioners and other claimants, when in reality what they are paying for is to let the Treasury pocket money that used to be paid into the fund.

The reason why pensions have not increased faster than prices is not because the Government lack the money but because they lack the will. It would take some convincing to persuade most pensioners that this week's increase keeps pace with prices. The increase that pensioners will receive this week is 5·9 per cent., at a time when prices are rising at 7·8 per cent. Some of those prices, most of which are under Government control, are rising even faster. I refer to the increases in the price of gas, fares and water. All those increases have a direct impact on pensioners.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall give way on this occasion, but as I am mindful of Mr. Speaker's injunction, it will be the last occasion on which I shall give way.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the underlying rate of inflation, if we exclude mortgage interest payments which most pensioners do not pay, is only 5·5 per cent. and that therefore the increase in pensions is above the cost of living of most pensioners? On top of that, most pensioners have some investment income, which has improved as a result of high interest rates.

Mr. Cook: We look forward with interest to the Social Security Bill 1990 in which we shall no doubt see the new re-rating of pensions to take account of the increased income from interest on savings. Many pensioners do not pay mortgage interest—that is reflected in the retail prices index—but they spend a much higher proportion of their income on food, fuel and the basic necessities of life. If we look at the increase in the price of those items in the retail prices index, we find that they are rising faster for pensioners than for anybody else.

Another measure that the Government have introduced which will have a direct impact on pensioners took effect only this week.

The introduction of charges for eye tests will hit pensioners harder than anyone else. Boots, which has a quarter of the market, is now charging £10·50 a test. Boots is the market leader, but some opticians are charging up to £15. The optician nearest to the House of Commons is charging £17·50 for an eye test. Even if we confine ourselves to a charge of £10·50, a pensioner would need to club together this year's uprating for four weeks to afford an eye check. There is one clear, inescapable consequence. Many pensioners will now not go for a regular check-up on their eyes, and as a result some of them will put their sight seriously at risk.

It is entirely fair for me to remind the Secretary of State for Social Security that eye-test charges were introduced this month, as he thought them up before his transfer to his present post. He was also in charge of last April's social security changes. I note that the Secretary of State's amendment to the motion invites the House to congratulate the Government on the

"simpler, fairer, more flexible system".

It is curious to describe the system as more flexible when it has resulted in all the extra allowances for special needs being abolished. The new, flexible scheme takes no account of claimants' needs, although it still makes rigorous searching scrutiny of individual claimants' means. It is curious to describe the system as fairer when the people who have been hit hardest are the most disabled, frail and invalid people who received the

[Mr. Cook]

allowances. They received heating allowance because they are housebound, they received diet allowance because they are chronically sick, and they received laundry allowance because they are incontinent. By definition, those who got most had the most to lose. Tens of thousands of them have already lost it all because the slightest change in circumstances triggers a review whereby they lose all the transitional protection they had last April.

Some people lost transitional protection because they were unwise enough to fall sick. One of the most distressing letters I have received in the past couple of months was from a resident of Midlothian who fell sick in October and transferred to sickness benefit. In February she came off sickness benefit because she was well again and she discovered that because she had been on sickness benefit she had lost transitional protection. Why had she received transitional protection? She had been receiving an extra allowance to pay the bus fare from Midlothian to Edinburgh to visit her elderly mother twice a week. Her mother is in a geriatric hospital where she will be confined until she dies. There is simply no way in which my correspondent can afford to make that trip on her new reduced benefit of £34·90 a week. Because she made the mistake of being sick, she is unable to visit her mother in hospital. Is that fairer? Is that more flexible?

Other people have lost transitional protection because, under the party of the family, they were unwise enough to take on increased family responsibility. In previous debates, I have drawn the attention of the House to the way in which a couple who have an extra child are entitled to an extra £10·75 addition in income support, but if they are on transitional protection that money is included in the transitional protection.

Since our last debate on the subject, an even worse case has been drawn to my attention. It relates to a single girl in Cheshire. Last April she was receiving £7 a week in allowances for her diet and health needs. At the end of April she gave birth to a child. She was given an additional £10·75 which wiped out the £7 in transitional protection but left her just a little better off as she was given an extra £3·75 a week net to feed the infant. In October the child died, her benefit was reassessed and the £10·75 was taken away, including the £7 she used to receive in transitional protection. She is now on a flat rate of £26·05. This girl has suffered an appalling personal tragedy. The grief and distress that she must experience should be understood by every Member of this House. The understanding that the Government have shown of her personal tragedy is to tell her that it has cost her her benefit. Is that a fairer system? Is that a more flexible system?

There is another example that I should like to share with the House. This very month the Secretary of State hopes to complete the proceedings on the Social Security Bill, which will force the unemployed into even more desperate efforts to find work. Under the Tory party, of course, some claimants have lost their transitional protection because they were unfortunate enough to succeed in their search for work. One case was brought to me by a citizens' advice bureau in north London.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): What is unfortunate about finding a job?

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman waits, he will discover what is unfortunate about finding a job.

One claimant in north London—a person confined to a wheelchair—through great personal effort, was successful in finding a temporary job, for four weeks. What support did the Government give that disabled person as a demonstration of the virtues of independence and self-reliance? The support they gave him was that when he ceased his four weeks' employment and came back on to benefit he discovered that he had lost his transitional protection because he had been temporarily employed. That is what is unfortunate about his experience. If I may say so, it is a question not of misfortune but of deliberate Government policy. That person is now £4 a week worse off than he would have been if he had never bothered to seek work.

But perhaps the most remarkable contradiction between this Government's rhetoric and the reality of their benefits policy is that, under the party of the owner-occupier, some claimants have lost all, or nearly all, their transitional protection as a result of the rise in the mortgage interest rates, which is the Government's chosen way of fighting inflation. Disability Alliance has drawn my attention to the case of one of its members who was receiving attendance allowance—indicating, as the House will know, that he was severely disabled. Last April he was receiving £17 a week in transitional protection. As a result of the increase in the mortgage interest rate, his interest payments have gone up by £13 a week. His entitlement, of course, has been adjusted to reflect that addition, but every single penny of the £13 comes out of his transitional protection. He is left with additional mortgage expenditure but not an additional penny in benefit.

An interesting feature of that case is that last April a then Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Security wrote to the Member of Parliament for this claimant, and ended his letter reassuring the MP by saying:

"I do hope that you will now be in a position to reassure Mr. F . . . that he will not be any worse off in April as a result of the changes."

Here we come to the greatest irony of all. The House will recall that when we debated the April changes we were assured repeatedly that 88 per cent. of claimants would be either better off or no worse off. I should like the Secretary of State to confirm that in calculating that 88 per cent., every one of the cases that I have drawn to the attention of the House in the last 10 minutes was counted. I should like to hear the Secretary of State try to explain to any one of those people that he or she was not a loser as a result of last April's changes. I invite the Secretary of State, or the Minister for Social Security—whichever one of them has the greater brass neck—to repeat to the House now that those people were not losers as a result of the "fairer, more flexible" system that was introduced last April. I cannot hear it from them; I am willing to hear it from any Conservative Back Bencher who voted for the measures that were introduced last April. I am bound to say that if no Conservative Member is prepared to argue that these people were not losers, we can conclude only that the 88 per cent. figure was a mischievous deceit practised upon this House and upon the public.

Not all the people who are on transitional protection have yet lost it. At the end of this week there will still be a minority drawing transitional protection. That is something of a mixed blessing particularly as this week

those who have managed to retain the transitional protection do not get a penny extra in benefit—that is 570,000 claimants, one tenth of all those on income support. By definition none of them got a penny last year either. For two successive years they have experienced a freeze in their income—two years in which prices have gone up by 12 per cent.

Many of those affected have written to me and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. There is a common theme to the letters that they send us: disbelief that even this Government could treat them so badly. They demonstrate a touching and misplaced faith in the belief that the Government cannot let them suffer so badly. I have in front of me one such letter and I shall share only this one with the House. It says:

"I have been waiting desperately for this £2·50 rise as my money runs out on a Friday and I have to wait till Tuesday comes round again before I get my pension . . . as I have angina, kidney complaint and rheumatoid arthritis I am so cold all the time and gas is so dear, on top of all this I am also a diabetic . . . I cannot afford a proper diet as I never have enough money left and for some time I have been losing weight".

During the radio interview when I heard the Minister perform I was astonished to hear him describe the situation in which that correspondent finds himself as a "soft landing". That suggests that he does not have the remotest grasp of the bleak despair of those half a million people on transitional protection. He is not alone in his incomprehension. The last time we had social security questions one Conservative Member asked of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary whether he was really satisfied that claimants had been warned sufficiently far in advance in order to make other arrangements once their benefit went down. The Under-Secretary replied that all those who were not having their benefit uprated and who were on transitional protection:

"will have been informed well in advance."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1989; Vol. 148, c. 588.]

Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us how on earth those claimants are supposed to make other arrangements. What are they supposed to do? How are they supposed to cease to be retired or cease to be disabled? How are they supposed to cease to suffer from arthritis or from angina?

One reason why it is inexcusable for Conservative Members not to understand the plight of those claimants is the letter which I just read to the House, which was sent from a Conservative constituency. I have received many such letters from Conservative constituencies, such as Harlow, Torquay, Romford and Brentwood. Every Tory Member of Parliament represents at least 1,000 claimants who, this week, will receive not a penny in uprating.

Are those Conservative Members going to leave it to Opposition Members alone to speak for their constituents? Are none of them prepared to speak for those who find themselves in that trap? Are none of them—I appeal to what motivates them most when they vote—more afraid of what their constituents might do to them than what their Whips might do to them? If there are any such people on the Conservative Benches I appeal to them to join us in the Lobby tonight and to vote for a simple act of justice for those bewildered and desperate pensioners who, once again, this week are cheated by their own Government.

4.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Moore): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and add instead thereof:

'notes that it is now one year since the Government introduced a simpler, fairer, more flexible system of income-related benefits and that the uprating which took effect yesterday added a further £2·2 billion to spending on social security, now running at £51 billiion a year; and congratulates the Government on the success of its economic policies which have enabled it not only to fulfil the pledge to maintain the value of the basic retirement pension in line with price movements but also to use the new system of income-related benefits to direct additional help this year of over a quarter of a billion pounds beyond the normal uprating to those in greatest need.'.

The Opposition have produced a motion that I fully understand in the sense that it seeks to challenge fundamentally the adequacy and the methods of the benefit provisions that were introduced a year ago. They are to be debated in part today. I have vivid memories going back beyond the past 10 years to the period when the Labour party had the misfortune to seek to govern our country.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): What about the pensioners?

Mr. Moore: I shall come to the pensioners later in considerable detail.

That the Opposition should table this motion despite their record of incompetence means that I must start my speech by reminding the House of why I am able, as Secretary of State, to spend record sums of money in our country's history on social security—the increases this month attest to that—and how miserably Socialism's record compares with our success.

We were, and will continue to be, re-elected to office because of the absolute inability of Labour Members to understand the reasons for our success. *[Interruption.]* I will take my time and make the points I wish to make. Opposition Members have tabled the motion and if we have the usual vulgar and irrelevant sedentary interruptions that we get from them, that will only take time out of the time available to them in the debate.

Social security needs, above all—I should have thought that this view was shared by Members in all parts of the House—wealth to be able to care. Without economic success, none of our achievements, or the understandable ambitions and aspirations of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), would be possible.

The uprating this year increases our spending on social security to £51 billion That is not simply an increase of £2 billion over the previous year, for it conceals additional increases because of the happy reduction in unemployment. That adds about £1·6 billion to the overall increase in my spending.

That record is not just for this one year. It reflects a decade of achievement in which we have seen increases in social security spending go up by 33 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* I think I know the point that the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) is making, albeit from a sedentary position. Would she care to rise and interrupt and make it in more detail? I should be happy to let her do so, and I would point out in reply that, even taking unemployment out of the data, the increase would still have been 27 per cent.

[Mr. Moore

In that decade of achievement, the priorities of the Government have been clearly shown by their spending on social security. We have seen a pattern of increase as a proportion of our overall public expenditure from 25 per cent. in 1978-79 to 31 per cent. this year. That is a sign of the added significance that we place on social security spending compared with Labour Members when they were in office, and the contrast in that improved position within that increased expenditure is telling in terms of social security priorities.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): If there has been such tremendous economic success and the Chancellor has a surplus of £14 billion, why will pensioners on £47·90, many of whom live in my constituency, not receive a penny increase in the next financial year because the Government are clawing back the whole of the transitional allowance? The same will apply the following year in relation to the £1·80. Surely the Government could have afforded to ensure that such pensioners got a real increase.

Mr. Moore: I shall come to the question of pensioners and to the transitional point to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is an important issue which I shall cover in detail. I wish first to contrast the relative impoverishment of the areas that Labour Members considered, rightly, to be important when they were last in office with the decade of achievement under the Conservatives. To do that I will take only two issues, the disabled and families with children.

The achievements of the last Labour Government on behalf of the disabled were considerable. They increased spending in real terms by 29 per cent.—they increased spending each year in real terms on the disabled by £220 million—and I recognise that achievement. But that was as nothing compared with the achievement of the last decade, during which expenditure on the disabled has increased in real terms by 90 per cent., or an annual average increase of £390 million.

That is the first contrast that I think the House will acknowledge. The second is about families with children, and I am talking about spending in real terms.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that one change that the Government have made applies to people who apply for attendance or mobility allowance? Does he agree that when such an application is granted the money will now be paid not from the date of the claim, if it takes time to process through appeal, but from the time it is granted? Why are people being cheated out of this money, out of disablement help that they need desperately?

Mr. Moore: The position on claimants is unchanged from that under the previous Government. I shall shortly go into more detail about the disabled.

I should like to look at the second area of major social security expenditure because the motion refers to all benefits. That second area is expenditure on families with children. When Britain last had the misfortune to have a Labour Government expenditure was reduced in real terms over five years by 7 per cent. I am sure that the then Labour Government had no intention of doing that, but they were not able to govern with economic success.

In the last decade we have seen an increase in expenditure on families with children of 27 per cent. In addition to this year's uprating, our economic success has allowed us to spend an extra £200 million on a poorer pensioner package which is welcomed by all hon. Members. I shall deal with that later. Again because of our economic success, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was able to announce in his Budget the abolition of the earnings rule for pensioners at a gross public expenditure cost of £375 million. Everybody welcomed that. He was also able to announce because of our economic success the completion of our national insurance contribution changes. That will especially help the lower paid and will cost £2·8 billion in a full year. I could continue to deal with our record, but I think that I should answer the first Opposition charge.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): People outside will treat the Secretary of State's contribution with absolute incredulity. Thousands of my constituents are finding it impossible to live through the week. How can the Secretary of State say that the Government have been kind and generous when people know that they cannot live from week to week? This week a lady in my constituency threatened suicide because of water bills pouring through her letter box. She has no possibility of paying them. The Secretary of State's speech is no answer to the real struggle that our people face day by day, in Conservative as well as in Labour constituencies.

Mr. Moore: I must try to proceed. I have taken more interventions than did the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. I have heard statements and not questions.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Moore: No, because, as I have said, I have given way more than the Opposition spokesman.

I have tackled the Opposition's first basic charge about the adequacy of provision. I shall now consider the challenge in the motion to the methods of the new system and our transition to it. Will the Opposition seek to argue for a return to the old, unloved supplementary benefit and single payments system? As they well know, it had flaws which they recognised. It was complex, difficult to understand, extremely intrusive, and absolutely inflexible. Hon. Members did not like the fact that, for example, a family earning £140 a week could be worse off than a family earning half that amount. None of my hon. Friends —I am not certain about Opposition Members—would welcome the return of the abused single payments system under which 80 per cent. of the money went to about 10 per cent. of the claimants.

This is the first anniversary of improvements that are already in. The first of those is income support. Nobody would deny that there is now a simpler system that is faster for claimants. That is important for those who claim and those who advise claimants because it means that they can understand the advice. Those who sought to try to help people through the old supplementary benefit system were not impressed by the complexities of the structure.

The new system is much faster. We are handling claims within five days, rather than nine days, as in March 1988. That is important for those who seek help. The system is also producing—again, I should have thought that this

would be welcomed by Opposition Members if they were in a more serious mood—an 80 per cent. success rate for the claimants compared with 73 per cent. previously.

The error rate—another important feature of a system designed to help people—has improved from 12 per cent. to 8·3 per cent. Furthermore, as I illustrated last year and in this week's benefits improvements with regard to child premiums, it is easier to target help more accurately as a consequence of the new income support system.

Family credit, again, is infinitely better than family income support. A total of £422 million has been spent in the first year in comparison with £180 million on family income supplement. I should have thought that that would be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I should also have thought that the House would be welcoming the fact that payments are averaging £25 a week. The expenditure percentage take-up so far is too low; it is 65 per cent. and I am launching a major new campaign to increase it. But the expenditure is more than double the FIS of a year ago.

I should have thought also that the House would wish to support the changes in the disablement arrangements. Last year, under the old scheme, 70 per cent. of long-term sick and disabled claimants were getting additional payments averaging £5·34 per week. I will not lay too much stress on the fact that under Labour the figure was not 70 per cent. but 38 per cent. Now all 270,000 are getting the disability premium, which is running at £13·70. I should have thought that that would be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I should have expected the House to welcome also the fact that, while under the old system 4,500 severely disabled people were getting domestic assistance additions averaging £6·35 per week, now 7,000 are getting severe disability premiums at £26·20. Again, I should have thought that that was something to be welcomed by all hon. Members.

Beyond that, the new system is much more flexible. My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and I said that we would monitor the system and seek to change it if necessary, and we have been able to do so, as all hon. Members know, not just last year but three times this year.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. Will he accept the simple truth that there are many elderly disabled people worse off under his regulations? What steps will he take to ensure that those people are brought back up to standard?

Mr. Moore: I always listen to the hon. Gentleman. I was trying to illustrate that in terms of the new versus the old system there have been enormous improvements for the disabled. I said, as did my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security, that we would watch, monitor and seek to improve the system. We have already made major changes in a relatively short period and I will continue to watch the area to which the hon. Gentleman particularly draws my attention.

I will come in a moment to pensioners, but I think it right first to address the point made by the hon. Member for Livingston about transitional protection. As he well knows, one cannot change any system in such a way that most will gain or be unaffected without some doing relatively less well. The Government promised in 1986—we have the economic success to fulfil our promises—that we would protect income support recipients from cash losses during the changes. Clearly, that protection reduces as entitlement rises with each uprating. If it did not, that would mean keeping the old system for ever with all its inequities. The hon. Member for Livingston has mentioned quite a lot in the media, and in the House briefly today, the nature of the old system of additions. Hon. Members should remember—sometimes people forget—that something like 40 per cent. of income support recipients were not in receipt, under that incredibly complex system, of additions of any kind. Furthermore, the average addition was running at £3·57 and, although this is not mentioned very often, the whole of expenditure on the heating addition of more than £400 million was put into the income support rate.

However, I recognise the point which the hon. Gentleman has made and I can confirm to the House, because I think it right to do so, that 3·25 million income support recipients will receive their uprating in full, over half a million will receive partial increases and, as he rightly said, nearly 600,000 will receive no increase at all. But the vast majority of claimants on income support——

Mr. Favell: A great deal has been said about the transitional provisions. However, but for the transitional provisions, would there not have been a two-tier system for people living in identical circumstances, old claimants and new claimants? That would be unfair and wholly unacceptable to many hon. Members and certainly to new claimants.

Mr. Moore: My hon. Friend is right. I was trying desperately to be non-political and helpful to the Opposition.

I remind the Opposition of what happened when they last attempted to make changes in the social security system; I think it was in 1976 when they were going through another process with the International Monetary Fund. Memories of those days are clear. *[Interruption.]* I will take plenty of time to make the point. Obviously the Opposition have memories of that time when they were trying to change the system from family allowances and child tax allowances to child benefit. I am not now talking about the £1·4 billion of which they cheated families with children in one year. In the face of economic failure they also had to reduce provision in cash terms by £300 million.

I have been led astray and I shall go back to the point that I was seeking to make, which was that the vast majority of claimants on income support—87 per cent. —will have an increase. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said today in the Chamber, 98 per cent. of pensioners will get an increase, as will practically all couples with children.

Mr. Robin Cook: Before the Secretary of State leaves that passage, will he answer the question that I put to him in my speech and confirm that every single one of the cases that I described, who have lost transitional protection in the past year, would have been counted in the 88 per cent. that he claimed last April would be no worse off as a result of the changes?

Mr. Moore: I said then, and I say again, that it is impossible without detailed notice of all the cases concerned to answer precisely. I am assuming, of course, that they were included. I will look at the individual cases; I always do. Of course, I will come back to the hon.

[Mr. Moore]

Gentleman, as I always do, but I will not go into a detailed commitment on those cases now. I cannot possibly do so without examining the details.

I shall go on to deal with pensioners, on whom the hon. Member for Livingston based most of his speech. I thought that the hon. Gentleman classically fell into the Socialist trap. It was a perfect illustration of the way in which the Opposition seek to argue the issue. They are obsessed with only one part of the pension equation—the level of the state retirement pension. I shall give sufficient illustrations for the House to understand the comparisons. For pensioners the true measure of economic well-being —no doubt the hon. Gentleman thought I might say this —is their total income. That is why the Government's approach throughout this decade contains two vital elements, not one.

The first is our pledge to increase pensions in line with prices to provide a secure foundation for income in retirement. The second is to pursue policies to keep inflation under control to safeguard the pensioner's income from other sources. *[Interruption.]* I shall illustrate the success in a moment. The comparisons should shock Opposition Members. The success of our policy versus the failure of Labour's promise is a fact of history that I shall illustrate. *[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members think that Labour Governments are utterly irrelevant, I cannot say that I disagree with that concept. But they have to learn to live with the reality of what they sought to do when in office.

I want to consider first the relative record of the way in which pensioners lived under two Governments, Labour and Conservative, remembering that we have been happy to look after 1 million more pensioners, but still our record is outstanding. Throughout our period of office the growth in net income has averaged 3 per cent. per year to produce a total increase in net income of 23 per cent. versus a miserable 3 per cent. in total throughout the whole Labour period of office. Secondly, my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) were very conscious of the role of savings.

What an appalling record there was under Labour. Throughout their period of office savings lost their value. *[Interruption.]* Those who are denying the role of savings for the pensioner will get a bigger shock at the next election. Under Labour, savings went down by 3·4 per cent. per year. In all they lost 16 per cent. of their value throughout the Labour period in office. For the eight years to 1986—we only have figures until then—savings increased by 7 per cent. per year, or 64 per cent. in all.

I saw the hon. Member for Livingston on television yesterday with wonderful charts, talking very properly about how pensioners should share in our prosperity. Let me remind him of the reality of sharing under Labour and what happened to the pensioner then. The hon. Gentleman talked on television yesterday about the pensioner needing to share in a successful growth of earnings and the economy. Let me tell him what happened. I shall give him exact comparisons.

In comparison to the average earnings of all manual workers in 1974 the pensioner was receiving 63 per cent. —*[Interruption.]* I will come to the Conservative figures in a second. Hon. Members will not like them. Between 1974 and 1979 the pensioner saw his percentage of the average manual worker's income go down, not up, from 63 per cent. to 60 per cent. Was that sharing in the national earnings and prosperity? That was the price of Labour's failure.

Since then, the pensioner's share has gone up, not from 60 per cent. to 63 per cent., but to 66 per cent. I can see Opposition Members on the Front Bench nodding and chatting. No doubt they are saying, "Of course, he is now arguing about the average pensioner." Let me give them other figures that they have not heard—the figures for those who have no income other than state benefits and their state pension income. What happened to them under the five years of Labour government? Their income went from 32 per cent. of the average earnings of all manual workers, not down happily, but up by 1 per cent. That was the achievement of Labour. Under the Conservative Government their income has gone up, not by 1 per cent., but from 33 per cent. to 37 per cent. That is what is called sharing in the prosperity of the rest of the community.

Mr. Robin Cook *rose*——

Mr. Moore: No; I have already given way. This is an abuse. If the hon. Gentleman will sit down, I shall give him the figures.

Mr. Cook: Those figures are wrong. They are fabricated.

Mr. Moore: I object. I shall now repeat carefully and precisely the figures that I have obtained from my officials. There are two groups of figures. First, would the hon. Gentleman like me to repeat the figures for the average pensioner, which he seemed to accept, or does he just want me to give him the figures for the pensioner who has no income other than state benefits? I shall repeat the figures, which are the figures obtained from my Department—[AN HON. MEMBER: "For what years?"] I will give the precise years. They are the latest family expenditure survey data because, of course, that is what I bring to the House. I repeat that a pensioner with no private income, whose only income is from the state, through his state pension and benefits, in 1974 would have received in comparison to the average of all manual workers 32 per cent. I acknowledge that by 1979 that had gone up to 33 per cent. By 1986, the latest figures I have from the FES data, it was up to 37 per cent.

Mr. Cook: No.

Mr. Moore: It is no good the hon. Gentleman saying no.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I have before me a table prepared by the Library's statistical section which I believe is accepted by hon. Members on both sides of the House to be a source of impeccable objectivity and reliability. I have a copy of the table of figures from which the Secretary of State is quoting. The figures show that the Secretary of State was correct with regard to a married pensioner between 1974 and 1979. However, the figures do not rise between 1979 and 1989. They actually drop from 32·6 to 26·1 per cent. between 1979 and 1989. Those are figures produced by the House of Commons Library. I invite hon. Members to question whether the statisticians who advise hon. Members on both sides of the House can be relied upon better than the Secretary of State.

Mr. Moore: These figures come from my Department. They were obtained from the economic advisers office. The hon. Member for Livingston knows full well that I do not use data other than that which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. I will consider the figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred. However, I repeat that the figures in my possession to 1986, the latest figures available from the latest thorough FES data, take the figure up to 37 per cent.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The figures given by the Secretary of State have been challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). The Secretary of State says that he will reconsider the figures. Will the Secretary of State give a clear commitment that the Minister for Social Security, when he replies, will try to clarify the position so that the House and pensioners outside this place, who know very well what——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Mr. Moore.

Mr. Moore: Of course that was not a point of order. I did not retract one iota of what I had said. The hon. Member for Livingston was talking about Library data. I have not seen those figures—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Member for Livingston will contain himself. The figures to which he referred relate to 1989. The hon. Member for Livingston may not be aware that the latest full FES data relate to 1986 and it was on the basis of those figures that I was giving the full, accurate data. I stand by that data because it reflects the latest full data which show an accurate comparison.

I want to illustrate the improving position in society. The hon. Member for Livingston quite rightly drew attention, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham, to the position of pensioners in relation to the poorest in society. The hon. Member for Livingston neglected to draw the attention of the House to the fact that in 1979 a total of 38 per cent. of pensioners comprised the bottom one fifth of the population. Happily today, only 24 per cent. of pensioners occupy that position. There has been a significant improvement in their relative position.

I agree with my hon. Friends and with Opposition Members that that is not enough. I am not satisfied and that is why I have brought forward a poorer pensioner package which will increase considerably the position of many pensioners in the autumn. *[Interruption.]* I wonder whether the hon. Member for Livingston could possibly pay attention to me for a moment because I want to correct what I know he would want me to correct, which are one or two unfortunate inaccuracies which he made in a radio interview on 10 April in the "Today" programme.

I fully understand that it is not always easy to keep all kinds of figures in mind at any one moment, but the hon. Member for Livingston referred to the increase as a token increase, going only to those on income support, only to those who are over 75. I must remind the House that it is not a token increase. It goes to 2·6 million people including approximately 1·4 million who are above income support level who will receive help in the form of housing benefit. It also includes 340,000 disabled people and, within the income support group, it includes 1·22 million pensioners on income support. That is not an insignificant number, as I am sure hon. Members on both sides of the House will appreciate. Therefore, many couples over 75 can see increases this year of more than 11 per cent.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Moore: Mr. Speaker invited us to be brief and I have answered many interventions. I want to finish my remarks now.

The date 11 April is an anniversary of which the Government can be proud. Our system for delivering benefits to the most needy had fallen into sad disarray. It was outdated, inflexible, unfair and bewildering in its complexity. We tackled that problem and overcame the nonsenses of the past. But Britain's prosperity, which the Government's policies have fostered, has given us the resources to do far more.

Mr. Lofthouse: Will the Secretary of State give way now?

Mr. Moore: I am trying to finish, as the hon. Gentleman is aware.

We have been able to protect the poorest against the impact of change without cash loss and we are using the improved system to direct still further help, flexibly and surely, to where it is most needed. We are doing all that on top of a massive commitment of resources to social security which is higher now, as all hon. Members have acknowledged, than ever before in our history. That is the surest testament to our economic success, based on capitalist principles of market enterprise. Economic success is at the heart of our more generous provision. It is a heart with the strength to care. I urge the House to support the Government's amendment.

5.5 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The difference between the Secretary of State's speech and reality shows that he lives on a different planet. It was unbelievable to hear the right hon. Gentleman make such claims. First, he said that he was trying to be non-political and then he peppered his speech with a series of party political points, not many of which were valid. He also failed to respond to the challenges of my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), in particular the challenge about the 88 per cent. of people who will be better off or no worse off. The Secretary of State fell at that fence. That was his Becher's Brook.

The Secretary of State also made the mistake of claiming that the Tory party will be re-elected because of its policies on social security. That is the last thing that the Tories would be re-elected for. Social security is one of the Government's many Achilles heels. They have failed abysmally.

The truth underlying this debate is that Ministers have deliberately tried to change people's perceptions of social security. To those in desperate need, social security used to be a reassurance that our civilised society would not desert them. That was very important for them. They thought that it would ease their poverty, edge them away from disaster and lend a friendly and dependable hand in times of need. That does not apply any more.

The Government have turned social security into dirty words. They have sullied compassion and scoffed at what they call the "dependency culture". If anything makes me sick, it is the sight of well-heeled politicians complaining

[Mr. Jack Ashley]

about the poor. The miserly uprating of a miserable system of benefits is one of the disgraceful aspects of that despicable attitude.

One would expect the Government's aggressive and parsimonious approach to be softened when they dealt with disabled people. However, that does not apply with this Government. Disabled people cannot stand on their own feet and their problems cannot be attributed to lack of will or enterprise. However, they have also become the targets of Government marksmen, the Ministers who are picking off the poor. Those same Ministers are boasting to the country that the Government have a £14 billion Budget surplus.

Disabled people were not included in the social security review. The Secretary of State promised them a review of their own when the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys studies are completed later this year. However, although they were not included in the review, they were greatly affected by the social security changes as no fewer than 75 per cent. of disabled people rely on social security.

The Government have boasted of their generous increase in money for disabled people, but individual disabled people are little better off. The main change has been that more disabled people are claiming their benefits. When the Minister makes his grandiose claims, he is misleading the House because individual disabled people are not better off. More disabled people are applying for benefits which they badly need because of the squalor into which they have been plunged by the Government.

The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State claim that there have been significant increases in the mobility allowance. However, increases in petrol and other costs for cars have been even greater. Therefore, that is a bogus claim. The basic fact is that many disabled people have lost out as a direct consequence of Government policies.

When the Secretary of State talks about flexibility, he is talking nonsense. Disabled people have lost flexibility as a result of changes imposed by the Government. They have lost individual help. The most severely disabled people now have to turn to the independent Disabled Living Foundation, which provides handouts, not payments as of right. It is outside the state system. There is no right of appeal. People must accept the decisions that are made. Where else does one have such a system in a civilised society? Moreover, the system receives inadequate publicity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston mentioned transitional payments in his eloquent and splendid speech, and he was right to do so. The Secretary of State was wrong to dismiss worries about transitional payments. Ministers made a clever move when they introduced transitional payments because they promised that there would be no immediate loss of benefit. Some innocent disabled people believed that assurance, which gagged the protests and held back an avalanche of complaints when the changes were first made.

It is only now that transitional payments are being understood. Prices are soaring and those on transitional payments have no overall increase in income. There will not be any such increase until income falls to the level that the Government deem appropriate, when it will be much less than it was in the first place. That is the check of the transitional payments. My hon. Friend was right to attack that. The scheme is a fundamental error. The real hurt will come later this year. Incomes will be frozen while inflation soars. What kind of Government can hit the disabled in that way while at the same time boasting of their great economic success? The Secretary of State referred to "economic success" at least four times. How can he boast about that and at the same time hit the severely disabled in this way? It is disgraceful.

What hope do disabled people have for the future? They did have hope for the future, but they were told to wait for the completion of the OPCS survey when the Government would respond to their plight—and some plight it is. When people become disabled before retirement, they have a fearful time under the present Government, as Labour Members recognise. They have only a one-in-three chance of getting a job. On average, their income is only half that of an able-bodied person, and that was before the social security changes which the Disability Alliance, accurately quoted by my hon. Friend, estimates has made 1 million disabled people worse off. They are the people we are speaking about today.

When the Minister for Social Security replies, he should tell us what has happened to the long-awaited promised review for disabled people. It is a punctured balloon. In a letter to Ian Bruce, the director general of the Royal National Institute for the Blind, on 27 February 1989, the Minister said:

"However, it would be wrong to assume at this stage that we will proceed to a review on the same lines as the social security reviews in 1984-85; that might well delay things unnecessarily. For that reason, I don't see much purpose in our discussing the terms of reference and composition of a review team."

Some letter that.

We do not know what will happen. Disabled people have been waiting for the review, but it may not be a full one. I do not usually make forecasts in the House because they are difficult things to make, but I shall make a forecast now of what will happen. There will be a snappy Civil Service investigation, done by people who are not disabled and have no experience of disabled living. The Minister will make minimal and inexpensive changes. The long-awaited additional costs allowance will not be forthcoming even though the Social Security Advisory Committee, agreeing with all disability organisations, recommended that the first step should be help with additional costs. I am putting down these markers for the Minister to answer tonight. If the review does not confirm my forecast I shall stand up and withdraw it.

I forecast that Government energy will be devoted not to helping all disabled people but to encouraging occupational and private schemes for the better off and the privileged. Will the Minister intervene now and deny that? If he does not, he should do so when he replies.

Contrary to what was said a few moments ago, we shall have a two-tier Britain. That will be the Government's epitaph. They have already achieved that in many areas. The Health Service will be the next immediate target, and a quick Bill on disability will finish off the process before the next election. The message to the people of Britain is: "Do not be disabled if you are also poor, at least while the present Government are in office."

5.18 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): From experience gained in my constituency through contact with many elderly people, there is no doubt that the 1980s have

witnessed a sustained and substantial improvement in the living standards of most pensioners. Sound economic policies and a realistic social policy have been the key to that important change. The essential safeguard for pensioners' living standards will always be a growing economy, able to pay for the services and benefits that the elderly need, coupled with the firm control of inflation to protect pensioners' savings. The policies of the past 10 years have helped pensioners on both counts, spreading greater prosperity to more pensioners *than ever before.*

Opposition Members are eloquent in their commitment to pensioners but as the history of the Labour Government shows—and as was confirmed last night in the speech on economic policy by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock)—their policies could never deliver the sustained and vigorous growth needed to fulfil all their grandiose pledges. In short, there was plenty of commitment, but no cash.

The present Government, by contrast, are determined to help pensioners and have the policies to do so. Today, Britain spends £23 billion on caring for our elderly people, which is more than is spent on either defence or education. The revival of the British economy has enabled the Government to raise spending on all forms of benefits for the elderly by almost one quarter in real terms since 1979. Despite all the nonsense that we hear from members of the Labour party about Britain lagging behind our European partners, it is instructive to note that the United Kingdom spends 9·6 per cent. of its gross domestic product on care for the elderly—a proportion exceeded in the European community only by France and Denmark.

It is not sufficient to measure any Government's record on care for pensioners solely in terms of overall expenditure levels. The system of support for the elderly should also be fair, simple, and easy for claimants to understand. Above all, it should get the help to those who need it most. The social security system which we inherited from the Labour Government—and which had developed piecemeal over almost half a century—failed on all those counts. The reforms that came into effect last year dramatically simplified and modernised the social security system. The service to the public has improved and both the time taken to process claims and the error rate in assessment of entitlement are down.

It was inevitable and necessary that the reforms would create some net losers. The alternative was to perpetuate many of the manifest weaknesses and inconsistencies of the old system, at huge cost to the taxpayer and to the most needy. No meaningful reform that is affordable, fair and brings extra help to those who need it can make all claimants better off. However, transitional payments ensure that no one loses out in cash terms.

If one accepts the logic of the 1986 reforms, one must also acknowledge that as benefit levels rise transitional relief should disappear. Only a tiny proportion of pensioners—about one in 50—will see no increase in income support levels after yesterday's upratings, due to withdrawal of transitional support. Similarly, more than one in nine claimants in the other groups targeted for extra help by the 1986 reforms—the sick and disabled, lone parents, and couples with children—will receive increases. The vast majority will receive the full uprating. Following last year's reforms, the social security system is providing more help to those who need it most more quickly than ever before. Crucially, it is doing that far more efficiently and with far fewer damaging consequences for the rest of the economy now that we have done away with benefit withdrawal rates of more than 100 per cent.

Current preoccupations with the first anniversary of implementation of the reforms should not obscure a remarkable development in the last few years—the way in which a growing number of pensioners rely only to a limited extent on the state for their pensions and benefits. Thanks to the spread of personal and occupational pensions, savings and home ownership, eight out of 10 pensioners receive income from savings or from their own pensions. Thanks to the revitalisation of the economy and to policies which have reduced inflation to less than one third of the peak that it reached under the Labour Government, pensioners' private incomes have risen well ahead of the growth in earnings. In the seven years to 1986, for example, pensioners' real incomes from savings and occupational pensions rose by a massive 60 per cent. Opposition Members find it difficult to grasp that what matters to pensioners is the growth of their total incomes, as was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, not merely benefits and the state pension but earnings and income from savings and private pensions. Typically, Labour Members think that all pensioners are totally dependent on the state. In reality, the majority have savings and private pensions, and most pensioners' standard of living is higher than ever.

Mrs. Beckett: Perhaps the hon. Lady did not entirely follow the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), when he pointed out that Labour, far from being unaware of the increased prosperity of many pensioners as a consequence of occupational schemes and of the state earnings-related pension scheme, actually brought those advantages into being. Under the present Government, they are being cut back so that in a few years pensioners' income growth will be substantially reduced.

Mrs. Roe: My experience is that pensioners feel that they are much better off than they have ever been, and that relates entirely to my point concerning savings and private pensions.

Since 1979 pensioners' total incomes have grown twice as fast as those of everyone else and five times faster than under the Labour Government. The modernised and reformed social security system brings more help to pensioners in greatest need. Last November's announcement of an extra £200 million income support will be particularly welcome to those elderly pensioners who never had a chance to participate in personal or occupational schemes or in SERPS.

The Labour party's extravagant and voluble compassion is nothing without policies to deliver sustained economic growth. The Government's record shows that a strong economy benefits everyone. The Labour party would be well advised to take that lesson to heart.

5.27 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I bring to the attention of the House, and to the Secretary of State especially, the case of a 79-year-old woman who came to my advice bureau the other week. She entered the room very breathless and obviously upset, but with a determined expression on her face. She is one of the many working

[Mrs. Llin Golding]

women of north Staffordshire whose lungs have been damaged from breathing the industrial pollution which previously existed in the Potteries.

That lady, who had known her fair share of low pay and hardship, said to me in a quiet, firm voice, "I have come to tell you of the plight of many of the pensioners where I live. They will not come to see you because they no longer believe that the Government will listen to what they have to say, so I have come for them. Many of us received little or no increase in our pension this time. I myself received nothing. Because of my health, I cannot do much housework or my laundry—I have to pay someone to do that, and all the heavy work. Every week I carefully portion out my money into separate piles so that I do not get behind with any of my payments, and so that I do not owe anyone anything, which would be a dreadful thing to do, but I have been finding it very hard to manage and I cannot go on any longer. I used to have four pints of milk a week—now I have two. I used to have two loaves of bread a week—now I have one. For many months I have been unable to afford fresh fruit. Occasionally I buy a tin of fruit, such as apricots, which lasts me a number of days. I was looking forward to an increase in my pension, but I have had no additional money. Please could you go down there and tell them what it is like for many of the pensioners?"

I wrote to the manager of the local Department of Social Security office—a caring man who would help if he could—and received the following reply:

"This lady was in receipt of Supplementary Pension prior to April 1988 and was receiving extra payment for her additional requirements in respect of heating and laundering costs. The Income Support scheme introduced in April 1988 made no provision for payments in respect of additional requirements and to prevent her becoming financially worse off under the new scheme a transitional addition payment was awarded to maintain the weekly allowance at the pre-April 1988 level. The effect of this is that . . . benefit will remain at this level . . . until the transitional payment has been eroded by subsequent increases in benefit rates."

The letter continued that the lady was

"receiving her full legal entitlement by way of benefit"

and

"will qualify for the higher rate of pensioner premium when she attains age 80 in August 1989 which will further erode the transitional addition."

That lady will not receive any additional pension or any extra money until her pension reaches £51, but she will continue to have to pay for laundry, cleaning and for people to help her with all the heavy work that she is incapable of doing for herself. She asked me to put her case to Ministers in the belief that they would do what they could to help elderly people like her who suffer from ill health and those who are poor and unable to help themselves. I ask them—please do not fail this lady.

5.32 pm

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): The first half of the Opposition motion is a red herring. I shall turn my attention to that in an attempt to persuade the House that it is better to judge by actions rather than rhetoric.

However, although I cannot agree with the extravagant language of the second half of the Opposition motion, I shall show more sympathy with the underlying point that the Opposition seek to make. In the process I hope to take up the challenge of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and prove that at least one Conservative Member is influenced considerably more by the plight of pensioner constituents than the threat of Government Whips. I say that with great respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown).

I always look to what a Government have actually done rather than paying undue attention to either the promises that they make for the future or criticising them for their present actions. Although it is correct that, during the last Labour Government, pensions were linked to earnings rather than prices, the hon. Member for Livingston conspicuously overlooked, when addressing this point—which he has addressed many times in this House and outside—the fact that the Labour Government were unable to deliver that promise for three out of the five years during which they were in office. On some occasions that was for reasons outside their control.

Before the Labour party lectures the Government for failing to continue the link with earnings, it should recognise that those of us who listen to what it plans to do—should it ever again be given responsibility for the government of the country—are inclined to reflect that the Labour Government were unable to keep their promise because of their own poor economic stewardship of the country. Rather than concentrate, as some Labour Members seem to do, on the past and what they would do in the future, they should recognise that, since 1979, the Government—who have made no secret of their wish to link pension increases to the level of prices—have carried out that undertaking to the letter.

I freely concede that some Conservative Members would have infinitely preferred it if, during this year when we have a substantial Budget surplus—and recognising that pensioner expenditure tends to be far less inflationary than the expenditure of younger earners, and less is spent on imported goods—we had safely increased the standards of living of pensioners and other beneficiaries. I am disappointed that the Government did not consider that to be an appropriate move.

Let us examine the system which is at the heart of today's debate. It would be extremely difficult for any hon. Member to say that we did not need the reforms represented in the 1988 legislation It cannot have escaped the attention of hon. Members that, at that time, there were 30 different benefits, myriad conflicting rules and a complex administration which was vastly overdue for reform. I have been at the forefront of those who have welcomed this endeavour to improve the simplicity of the social security scheme and, in the process, to improve targeting so that those in greatest need receive most help.

I warmly welcomed the Government's aim to remove the poverty trap and encourage savings—to which Opposition Members have not paid enough attention—to foster positive attitudes towards employment and—I make no apology for this—to seek to move away from what has come to be known as the dependency culture. We should recognise that we should not continue to expect the state alone to prop us those who are able to earn additional incomes. At one time it may have been accepted as the norm, but that is clearly not so now.

The Government's aims are laudable. I regret that the results do not seem to have equalled the aspirations. I have already endorsed the welcome attempt to streamline the

benefit structure, and remove the pages of regulations, so that it is more easily understood. I have no hesitation in once again endorsing that attempt.

The Opposition spoil their case by exaggeration. However, it is true that a minority of pensioners who—being no longer entitled to the various additions on matters such as fuel, diet and incontinence, which they had and which no doubt contributed to the complication of the scheme—will find one year later, as the transitional period moves on, that they are in a worse position. That seems to be buying the simplification of the system which I support at too high a cost.

Targeting has undoubtedly benefited millions of people. Again, the Opposition spoilt their case by failing to concede that many gained as a result of last year's changes. It is a pity that a much-improved system for many people is reduced in the eyes of the population because there is a minority for whom it is not so.

Targeting is a splendid aim, which I continue to endorse, but it does not appear to be working. The people for whom it is not working are not those who, by most definitions, do not need it to work because they are among the less well off, no matter how that definition is stretched. The fact that there will be no increases or will be net reductions for some and modified increases for others because they are not entitled to the additions that they were able to expect before, or because of the end of the transition period, or because of both, shows that there is a corner of a broadly extremely successful review of social security to which the Government must turn their attention.

I concede that in most cases improvements have been made. I concede the point made by the Secretary of State that in the autumn there will be further advances for those whom I and other hon. Members have represented in previous debates, but there is no question but that a tiny element have not benefited from targeting, which was one of the principal objectives of the reforms. If people who are by no means well off are losing further benefit, targeting is not working across the board in the way that it is to a considerable extent for millions of beneficiaries, on whose behalf we understandably receive few representations.

There is no virtue in being consistent, but I hope that hon. Members will concede that, whatever else, I am at least consistent about the introduction of the requirement to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge. It may be desirable according to the views expressed by some of my hon. Friends, who say that it will involve the community and lead to understanding of what local government costs, but the other side of the ledger is that many who would have benefited as a result of the social security reforms will be tipped back on to the other side of the register. It may be too late to redress that merely by saying that we shall discontinue the 20 per cent. contribution, but this aspect must be taken into account by Ministers as they try to plug gaps.

I am reassured when Ministers remind me that they continue to monitor the position. To their eternal credit, they have monitored the system since 1 April 1988, and as a result of pressures brought by a number of hon. Members they have moved. The capital limit of £6,000 was increased to £8,000, and an announcement was made recently regarding 16 and 17-year-olds. I hope that the Minister will take this as a sincere representation on behalf of the people whom I represent, but the same could be said of people who live in Labour constituencies. When they ask me, "Could you live on this net amount?" the only answer that I can give in all conscience is no. When they ask, "Am I one of the better off, because that would seem to be the reason for my not receiving as much as I did before?", again, I must answer no.

The position of beneficiaries has undoubtedly improved as a result of last year's changes, but thousands of people have been adversely affected. As I and other hon. Members were able to persuade the Minister to move on previous anomalies, I hope that we will persuade him that fresh thinking is required. It reflects no credit on an otherwise excellent range of social security reforms if, with inflation rising, people tell me "I am about to receive less in 1989 than I did in 1988." That cannot be right.

5.44 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle), who has a reputation for independence and thinking out his own thoughts. His speech would repay careful study by Ministers, and I hope that he will receive answers to the questions that he posed.

It will come as no surprise to hon. Members who served on the Committee considering the Social Security Act 1986 that we are in this position today. I welcome the motion, which was ably presented by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and will recommend that my colleagues vote for it.

The Fowler reviews set themselves an impossible task. It was impossible to simplify matters, which was laudable, and increase targeting, which was also an honourable objective, without incurring any additional cost. It is the main reason for the difficulties being experienced now by hon. Members' constituents.

The Secretary of State for Social Security and the Minister for Social Security are picking up the consequences of the fact that no detailed research was done prior to the Fowler reviews. We regularly have these debates, in which Conservative Members trade statistics and Opposition Members confront them with individual cases. It is a hopeless and frustrating process which gets us nowhere.

Some of the points made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar were right. Perhaps Opposition Members do exaggerate the number of people experiencing financial difficulty, but that does not detract from the fact that some are indeed suffering very real difficulties. The debate should not proceed further without our placing on record the fact that the basic level of premiums and allowances under the new income support, family credit and housing benefit rules are far too low to allow a normal person a normal standard of living and to play his or her part in the community. It is substantiated by figures produced by the Policy Studies Institute, which show that 2 million pensioners are on income support, 2 million additional pensioners are on housing benefit and 1 million are estimated to be claiming benefits to which they are entitled. That clearly shows that the basic state pension cannot provide for basic needs, and that state of affairs must be addressed. Almost half of the 10 million pensioners are caught in the poverty trap, and the Government have an obligation to do something urgently about that.

Mr. Favell: The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the dilemma that faces any Government responsible for looking after pensioners who cannot otherwise look after themselves. He said that the basic pension is not adequate for 2 million pensioners on income support. That being so, what is the point in increasing the basic pension for rich people such as Lord Forte or the Prime Minister? Why not concentrate benefit on income support for the poorest pensioners? What is the point of spreading the jam thinly?

Mr. Kirkwood: I do not think the hon. Member understands the difference between the needs of those on contributory state pensions and those who enjoy occupational pensions. I will try to deal with that point later in my speech.

It is incumbent on Opposition Members to resist the temptation to be extravagant about numbers. I want to limit my remarks to the generation of pensioners with us now. They will come to the end of their natural lives between now and the end of the century. There has been a significant change in the rules for providing most income from occupational personal pensions and after the year 2000 when these pensions are the norm we will not have this problem of inadequate pension provision, but the problem will get worse before it gets better. There is no point in going on in abstract terms about total incomes or even average incomes of pensioners; we have to deal with the 2 million real people suffering real hardship now. That is the question the Government must address today.

As was said earlier, benefits have increased in real terms over the period of this Government by only something like 2 per cent., while earnings have increased by more than 20 per cent. I think that the figures used by the hon. Member for Livingston are right; they are the ones the Library supplied to me. I am seeking to make a contrast between the increase in pensions and benefits and the increase in earnings, however measured, and the Government cannot deny, whichever figures are used, that there has been a substantial difference between them.

I do not think it is possible to rely only on price protection between now and the end of the century. I understand why the Government should make that pledge, and it is a pledge worth having, but if one applied price protection to the July 1948 pension figure of £1·30, which was the original level at which the pension was set, it would only be something like £18·70 at today's prices for a single person, and the figure of £2·10 in July 1948 would now only be £30·59 for a married couple. Nobody would seek to justify that miserly level of increase over that period of time. Also, the Social Security Advisory Committee says time and again in its reports that the Government cannot simply, between now and the end of the century, hide behind the screen of price protection, because the standard of living of pensioners will inexorably fall further and further behind. That is an absolutely certain consequence of the Government restricting their policy for uprating benefits like pensions merely to price protection.

Transitional protection is presented as an example of generosity by the Government. To me, it is a device to conceal the full extent of the original 1986 cuts. This debate will occur year after year, and it does this House no credit to keep running away from the fundamental problems causing the difficulties. I have warned in previous debates that this day would dawn, and constituents I meet are frequently distraught, furious and feel cheated. What distresses me more than anything else, however, is that, after going through these three respective angry phases, they invariably adopt a resigned, subdued attitude, as they realise they must submit themselves to the Gradgrind of continuing poverty for yet another year or even longer.

The poll tax rebate scheme, from a Scottish point of view, is in a state of total chaos. Nobody seems to be able to get answers to questions and all sorts of anomalies are appearing. This is a totally iniquitous, unjustified, damaging and complex new tax, loved by nobody north of the border. If English Tory Members think they have problems with transitional protection, just wait until the poll tax comes into force in England. In future in these debates words of criticism such as those of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar will seem like milk in balm compared with what they will then have to tell Ministers.

Problems are not only restricted to deprived urban areas, but occur in rural areas, too. A series of very disturbing representations was made to me this weekend in Hutton in Berwickshire, an otherwise idyllic part of the world. The hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) lives within a stone's throw of there. He will confirm what type of place it is. There were real problems there which caused me substantial concern. Another separate problem is the fact that there is a capital upper limit of £8,000 on the poll tax rebate, and not, as should be since it is a personal charge, a married couple's upper limit of £16,000. This is in my view an absolute disgrace.

I anticipate I will have the sympathy and support of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar for my final point. I am worried about the injustice experienced by those with small occupational pensions and other income. For reasons I have explained earlier, nearly half the 10 million pensioners in our country are potentially caught in a poverty trap. Any income over basic benefits is firstly taken into account in reducing their income support and then housing benefit. I have not done a calculation at the current rates, but under the benefit rates in place in November 1988 the first £30 of increased additional income could be reduced to £4 extra in certain circumstances, and I know of cases like that. It seems to me that, where the Inland Revenue has a special scheme enabling people to have the first £20 of income free from tax, it is quite wrong for the DSS to require it to be declared against income support and housing benefit. I put it to the Minister of State that the Department should do something urgently about that. Some earnings should be disregarded over and above those that already are. That would help remove some of the worst problems of the poverty trap faced by some of our worst-off pensioners.

The Government do have a problem. Provision for pensioners between now and the end of the century is inadequate and a matter of real concern, and I hope the Government will take carefully into account what is said in debates like this and try to do something to alleviate problems caused by the whole transitional mechanism before it hits us again in the same disastrous way next year.

5.56 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I do not know how familiar you are with contemporary rock music, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it may not have escaped your notice that a new rock song has been going around recently,

reviving a flagging theme, the red rose. Sadly, it will not get to No. 10. However, I have been struck by some of the lyrics in that song, saying

"To help each other every day,
Remove injustice on the way".

Perhaps those lyrics are somewhat trite but, taken in isolation, no reasonable person can dispute the basic sentiments expressed. However, if these lyrics are a declaration of intent of any Labour party which might seek office at some distant time, and if they are taken in the context of today's motion by the official Opposition and the past record of the Labour Government of 1974 to 1979, they are meaningless. Good intentions, glib promises and pious rhetoric are just not good enough. It is a cruel deception to raise expectations which cannot be realised.

Labour's October 1974 election manifesto proudly proclaimed

"Britain will win with Labour".

It proclaimed that Labour's policies would

"protect the weak, the poor and the disabled, . . . and to maintain and improve their living standards."

The subsequent performance of that Labour Government failed dismally to live up to those high-falutin' declarations. Labour might have been the winners, but the losers were the pensioners, the less well off and the disabled in our society.

The oft-repeated claim that pensions increased each year by the movement of prices or earnings, whichever was the greater, is not sustainable. It was not honoured in 1976 or in 1978. If Labour had won the 1979 general election, its proposed policies would have meant that it would not have been honoured in 1979, either. Mrs. Barbara Castle dispensed with the historic calculation of earnings and replaced it with a system of forecasting in 1976. That deprived pensioners at a stroke—if I dare use that expression—of £500 million. At today's prices that is over £1 billion.

To add insult to injury, the method of forecasting was wrong in five of the seven years in which it was used to calculate the increase in the state pension. Even the Christmas bonus did not escape unscathed. It was not paid in 1975 and 1976. If Lord Barnett's memoirs are to be believed, it was only a kicking and screaming Lord Ennals and the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) who agreed to pay the Christmas bonus in 1977. Opposition Members should think twice before lecturing the Government on their uprating of benefits record. Their criticisms do not square with the facts.

The Government have not simply paid lip service to the need to help pensioners, the less well off and the disabled. They have encouraged the creation of wealth, with the result that this year the Government have been able to spend a record £51 billion on benefits. Approximately half of it is paid to the elderly. Pensioners have shared in the nation's prosperity. Their total incomes have grown twice as fast as those of everyone else and five times as fast as they grew under the last Labour Government.

Much play has been made of the claim that Britain's pensioners lag behind those of our European competitors. Again that myth cannot be sustained, because 9·6 per cent. of Britain's gross domestic product is spent on all programmes for the elderly, excluding medical care. Britain is third on the EEC chart. We are marginally behind Denmark, at 10·4 per cent., and France at 9·8 per cent.

The most powerful argument for what the Government have done for pensioners comes not from me but from Mrs. Dorothy Rhodes, the president of the National Federation of Retirement Pensions Associations. Recently she said:

"I have spoken loudly in support of parity with Europe but during the past year . . . having spoken at length to those who receive Europensions and discovered that in many cases the actual cash received in relation to the cost of living is often lower than in the United Kingdom, I am revising my opinion, for in no way can our Federation ask for an equality that would disadvantage our own people."

There is a gulf between Conservative Members and the Opposition over pensions. The gulf is not about whether we care, or about trying to find the best solution and the best policies for providing help to the less well off. That does not divide us; everyone believes that the most effective help possible should be provided. What divides us is philosophy and the implementation of policy. Our policy during the last 10 years has benefited pensioners. We must create wealth so that the state can then spend the money that is generated on providing genuine help to the less well off and to pensioners whose only income is the state pension. It is crucial to target resources.

I return to child benefit which, deliberately, has not been increased but frozen. My right hon. Friend's decision was absolutely correct. My wife and I have a young daughter. It is nonsense for my wife to receive a tax-free sum of money each week towards the upkeep of our child. I much prefer that money, or the money that my wife would have received as an increase in child benefit, to be targeted on genuinely less well-off families through the income support system and the family credit system.

The less well off rightly deserve help and they are getting it from the Government. The vast majority of people do not whine and complain. They accept the Government's philosophy. They accept also that the money is going to those who are in genuine need and who need to be helped.

6.5 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) asked you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you enjoyed pop music. My eldest son writes pop music, although I brought him up on Bach and Beethoven. I much prefer Bach and Beethoven. The majority of my pensioners preferred the Labour Government to the present Conservative Government when it came to pensions.

The hon. Gentleman used the word "whine." That was obnoxious. The pensioners that I shall be speaking about are not whining. They are demanding a right that they worked for all their lives. In the community that I represent, many husbands have died and their widows have been left on their own. Their husbands earned poor money and died young as a result of the work that they did. Their widows have been left totally dependent on the state.

We have been challenged and asked to look at total incomes and targeting. I accept both challenges. I expect the hon. Member for Chelmsford to accept the challenge that I intend to put to him, based on the cases to which I shall refer and also on the cases mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding). I refer to a widow whose husband died younger than he ought to have done, because of the work in which he was engaged. I wrote to

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

the local Department of Social Security office. I do that as a matter of course until I find that DSS employees are victims of Government policy. I complained that that widow would not receive a penny increase in the financial year 1989-90. I received a letter from the DSS, together with the calculation. I ask the Secretary of State to listen to the simple terms of the calculation, which are that the total income on 11 April 1988 was £47·90 and that the total income on 10 April 1989 was £47·90.

Does the Secretary of State believe that a pensioner whose total income is £47·90 should be targeted? That pensioner, on £47·90, will have to soldier through the whole of the next financial year without a single penny increase in her pension. The whole of her pension increase has been clawed back because of the loss of the transitional addition. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Onger (Mr. McCrindle) did not say that he supported the cases that we are bringing to the Secretary of State's attention. This pensioner has lost the whole of the increase for 1989-90. Moreover, because she was in receipt of transitional addition amounting to £3·80 instead of just £2, she will lose the whole of her increase for 1990-91 as well.

With the odd exception, Conservative Members are endorsing a system under which a pensioner with a total income of £47·90 will spend this year and next year without a single increase in her pension to cover increases in the cost of living. If we do not include the mortgage interest rate and take inflation as 5·5 per cent., we still know that water charges are to increase by 10 per cent., and that, despite low inflation, the cost of living and the prices of essential goods still change. We know that rents will go up, and only a percentage of those rent increases will be covered by increases in housing benefit.

The pensioner I mentioned—I hope that the hon. Member for Chelmsford agrees that she should be targeted—is one of the 20 or 25 per cent. of pensioners who will have to depend on a static income to cover essential costs for the next two years. She is one of dozens of such pensioners in my constituency. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that is fair? Does he believe that the policy of targeting benefits should include that pensioner? In an intervention I asked the Secretary of State whether he thought that a pensioner on £47·90 a week should be targeted for support or whether that pensioner should go through the next two years without any increase in income to handle the additional costs of living. The Secretary of State did not reply.

I understand that by their very nature transitional additions must be phased out, but we should remember that the transitional additional allowances were dragged out of the Government as a result of pressure from both sides of the House more than 12 months ago when the impact of the new scheme was fully understood. I understand that among others the Prime Minister at her Finchley surgery suddenly realised the consequences of introducing the new system. Why is there not the same reaction this year? The same thing is happening. The same dozens of people who knocked on our surgery doors last year—I hope that they are knocking on the surgery door of the hon. Member for Chelmsford—are now saying that they did not realise that when they received the transitional addition the entire increase in their pensions would be clawed back in a single year and within a year.

The transitional additional allowance was not some act of great generosity but was a limitation of the loss of benefit as a result of the change in the system. We should watch out for the Orwellian double talk that the Government use when they talk about the transitional additional allowance as if it were a marvellous act of generosity when it was limiting the loss of benefit as a result of the so-called reform to a simpler system.

No one should have believed that a transitional addition equivalent to the entire increase in the pension should have been clawed back, as has happened. I hate to be in this position. I do not agree with the whole show and I do not agree with the system, but if we have to work the system and make a desperate plea on our hands and knees, I ask the Secretary of State now why he does not have an urgent rethink. He claims that he is monitoring, so here is the information he requires. Why does he not adjust the system at least by a much more gradual process by which the transitional additional allowance is clawed back? I hate the notion of presenting such a plea, but as the situation is desperate and the Government have a majority and can override our motion and continue to enforce the provisions, just as the Secretary of State had a rethink when he introduced the transitional allowances, will he not consider introducing in the next month or so some measure to provide a much slower and more gradual claw-back of the transitional addition? For example, he could say that no pensioner should lose more than one quarter of the increase in the next financial year.

If the Secretary of State is to introduce such a horrid system, let him at least do it with some amelioration, and introduce a scheme so that pensioners, such as the widow to whom I referred, do not have to soldier through the coming year and the year after without any increase in income. I hate the idea of having to ask the Secretary of State to do it, but will he reconsider urgently the concept of phasing out the transitional additional allowances over a much longer period? Instead of clawing back the entire £2·06 increase this year and virtually writing off next year's increase in the income of the average pensioner such as the one I described—and there are dozens of them in my constituency—if the Secretary of State were to ameliorate that situation it would be a modest crumb for us and we could tell our constituents that someone has listened, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme argued.

When the Minister replies, will he give his assessment of what it would cost not to claw back the full £2·06 from those in receipt of transitional addition in the next year if a pensioner were allowed to retain three quarters of the £2·06 increase? What will be the additional cost in a financial year to introduce a more gradual transition? Conservative Members repeatedly have defended the system by arguing that the Conservative party and not the Labour party has established a major economic success story which allows the Government to be generous to pensioners. But why can they not be generous to pensioners living on £47·90 a week? Why do they have to claw back the entire pension increase? We are not talking about millions of pounds. Perhaps we are talking about hundreds of thousands of pounds or whatever figure the Secretary of State or the Minister wishes to provide. If the Government's economic success story is so great, surely they can assist and support that group of pensioners.

I read with fascination the Secretary of State for Wales' speech last night to that tower of Tory power, the Tory

Reform Group. He condemned the "simplistic economic dogma" which does not solve the nation's problems. Nor does the simplistic social policy dogma that has emanated from some quarters of the Government and the Conservative party. But the Secretary of State is a member of the Cabinet which endorsed all the changes. I look forward with great interest to his speech on social policy in the near future, on behalf of the pensioners whom I represent. But we have to depend upon urgent pleas to the Secretary of State.

In the past few weeks, I have done what I did last year. I have sent a whole batch of cases, such as the case I have described, to the Prime Minister in the hope that some message of assistance and support to the pensioners may come from on high. I noticed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in presenting the Budget, spoke about the £14 billion he had to pay off the national debt. But there is another debt to be paid to a whole generation of elderly people who sacrificed their efforts, their health and their lives, and who are entitled not to request, to beg or to whine but to demand the right to a fair and just pension system.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is very little time and I hope that hon. Members will make brief speeches.

6.17 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West):

"I wish to raise the subject of the uprating of retirement pensions, and especially the uprating that took place last November. I want to call upon my hon. Friend the Minister to consider paying a bonus of an extra week's pension for Britain's 8 million pensioners. I believe that this is urgently required to make up for what I consider to be a sleight of hand or conjuring trick which occurred last November. At that time pensioners received 1·8 per cent. less than the law required that they should receive. . . . I do not think that Parliament should allow the pensioners to be double-crossed in the way that they have been over the latest pensions uprating . . . the pensioners' own money was hi-jacked by the Government to pay their Christmas bonuses at Christmas . . . many of us are seriously disturbed by the fact that a firm pledge, about which we have frequently publicly and proudly boasted, is apparently not to be honoured." [*Official Report*, 12 March 1979; Vol. 964, c. 231-35.]

Those are harsh words, but they are not my words and they are not about this Government. Those are the words of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and the words of Mr. George Rodgers, the former Labour Member for Chorley, almost exactly 10 years ago, speaking about the last Labour Government. Whatever we may have heard from the Opposition about the good intentions of the Labour party, we can hear from their own lips what the performance was when they were last in power. For the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to say that had their formula remained in place there would have been an increase of £17-plus a week for pensioners is sheer deception, as is manifest in the words of his Back-Bench colleagues that I have just quoted. The difficulty about the speech of the hon. Member for Livingston was that it was almost entirely anecdotal.

Of course there are people who are suffering under the arrangements that have come into force recently. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) was right to point out that there are anomalies that need to be redressed. My right hon. Friend has said that he will look at these problems and keep the matter under continuous review. Where the hon. Member for Livingston was wrong was in not giving any account of the enormous improvements that have been made by this Government, or of the enormous improvement in the welfare of pensioners that has taken place over the past few years. We are not talking just about the basic pension; the improvements in income support and in housing benefit have to be taken into account.

My hon. Friends have already spoken about the total proportion of GDP that we in this country, compared with other European countries, spend on benefits. We are third in the European league. It is right that that should be pointed out, but it is right also to point out that the changes that we have made have not been made without extra money. An extra £200 million is being spent on income support as from October. In particular, the older and disabled pensioners will benefit by an extra £2·50 a week.

Equally, the Opposition have taken no account of the exceptionally cold weather payments. Recently they criticised the basis on which those payments were made. But at least the payments were introduced by this Government; they did not exist when the last Labour Government were in power. The Labour Government certainly did not think of such payments. Nor have the Opposition paid any tribute to the very generous improvements in the tax allowances for pensioners that were introduced in the last Budget. The age allowance was increased very substantially, the age threshold was reduced, and the earnings rule was abolished. All of those things are very good news for pensioners.

Instead, Opposition Members harp on about poverty. They produce statistics to show that an ever-increasing number of people in this country are living in poverty. It is worth looking at the basis of those claims. They tend to operate on one of two bases: either earnings related to average earnings, or earnings related to the thresholds for income support. Of course, the difficulty with that is that every time we improve the level of social security the number of people allegedly in poverty goes up. It is a no-win situation for the Government. But those are precisely the sort of statistics that the Opposition like to deal in.

We have to look at the fact that we are now spending £51 billion on the social security budget, which is a real increase of 33 per cent. since the last Labour Government were in power. We have to look also at the increases that we have made in income support and family credit. The amount being paid in income support is £421 million more than was paid in supplementary benefit; and £400 million is being paid in family credit against £200 million under the old family income supplement. Those are real increases that are benefiting the majority of people.

The great problem in this country is that, despite all the money that is being spent, we still have people who are genuinely poor. We must ask ourselves why it should be so. When we are spending £51 billion—nearly £1,000 a year for every man, woman and child in the country—why are there still poor people? If the bottom 10 per cent. of the population were regarded as the really needy, that would give them £10,000 a year each. Why do we have poor people? It is because benefit is very poorly targeted. So long as we have universal benefits, such as child benefit —this was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns)—there will be a problem. Of course, child benefit did not benefit the genuinely poor

[Mr. John Butterfill]

because it was clawed back from their other benefits; it benefited only the middle classes. So long as we continue with nonsenses like that we will never redress poverty in this country.

Mr. Robin Cook: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could clarify a point. He has just said that so long as we continue with nonsenses like universal benefits we will never resolve the problem of poverty. Is he including in "universal benefits" the state pension?

Mr. Butterfill: I include all benefits in my assessment of the way in which we should treat people. I am not suggesting, for example, that we should get rid of the state pension, but I am saying that we need very much more accurate targeting of benefits if we are to eliminate poverty.

6.26 pm

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): The Government have a very shabby record in their treatement of the poor, the disabled and the under-privileged, particularly those who are dependent on benefits, and even more particularly the elderly. It is clear that the Government believe that by reducing the value of benefits, by failing to uprate benefits in line with inflation, they will produce a net result of a reduction in the dependency culture and will compel people back into productive economic employment. This is just not the case. People are not dependent on benefit of their own wish; the vast majority wish to be employed, and wish to have a dignified standard of living that they have earned and provided for themselves. If they are in need of a pension, if they are in need of benefit, it is not something that they have willed upon themselves.

It is a disgrace that, at a time when inflation is running at nearly 8 per cent, we see increases in benefit of only 5·9 per cent. There is nothing complicated about the net effect of that: the poor will become poorer—straight, unavoidable fact. There is no whining about it, no harping on about it; I am simply reporting what many of my constituents have told me, and what the constituents of all hon. Members will be telling them over the coming weeks. Whatever extravagant claims the Government may make, nothing can explain the policy of lowering the income of those people who are dependent on benefits.

That is particularly exacerbated by the combined system of taxation and benefit—or rather the fact that those are not combined. The two have to be looked at together because, together, they exacerbate the poverty trap. They frequently and continually inhibit people from taking low-paid or part-time work because, by doing so, those people would be worse off than they are when on benefit. Most people do not have a fair choice—the combined effect of the tax and social security system ensures that they stay at the bottom of the pile.

My greatest criticism of the Government is of their meanness of spirit. Yes, the system is simpler than it was before—and that is to be welcomed—but it is also totally inadequate. The Government had an invaluable opportunity to revise the system, to simplify it, and to make sure that no one was worse off. Such opportunities come very rarely. There was an opportunity last year, and the Government passed it over. Yes, many people are worse off. We are talking about a minority, but it is a minority of people who are suffering through no fault of their own.

We are looking not at a decision that was made against the backcloth of a shortage of revenue, but at one that was made against the backcloth of a surplus of £15 billion. Despite the growing shadow of inflation, which endangers our economic recovery, we have seen consistently strong economic growth. One of the advantages of a strong, successful economy is that it enables a caring, socially responsible Government to share the fruits of success with those members of society who have not been able to benefit directly—those who are not earning high wages, those who are not getting increased revenue from shareholdings. If the Government seriously want to encourage everyone to participate in our economic success, they should understand that they must give everyone, including the needy and the poor, a share of that success. They should never have considered cutting the real value of social security benefits.

The uprating of pensions and other benefits, including child benefit, should be automatic. The Government have shunted child benefit to one side and it has been gradually eroded, presumably in order to dismantle the universality of that benefit.

The Government should go further and examine ways to make benefits more buoyant. They should ensure that the poor benefit from our economic success by giving an additional increase in benefits which is related to the success of the economy. It is a measure of the Government that, today, we are debating real cuts in benefit. We are witnessing the poor becoming poorer when the Chancellor does not know how to spend the reserves that he has.

Pensioners have a particular right to be angry. The Government happily preside over a system of supposedly contributory benefits. The system educates people to believe that they are paying into a fund on which they will be able to draw, by right and with dignity, in later life. In reality, however, the Government treat pensions as though they were a handout rather than money which is given back to those who have paid in over the years. Pensioners are only asking for what is theirs by right and for what they have paid. They are right to argue that the Government are wrong to cut the value of their pensions. This is an argument of principle that goes far beyond the fact that many pensioners are living in great poverty today. If the Government have decided that they do not accept the contributory principle, they should have the courage to say so rather than to act as the arbiters and controllers of what is given back to those who have paid over the years.

The growing number of dependent elderly poses a challenge to and a great problem for the future reduced working-age population. To try to wriggle out of social obligations, to try to reduce the cost of supporting the elderly by cutting pensions and by trying to push the elderly into the private health sector by subsidising private health insurance amounts to a cowardly approach to a problem that must be faced honestly and openly.

It is right to continue the tax relief on personal private pensions to enable many people to enjoy a better standard of living in later life. Ultimately, if the majority of our elderly are covered by such schemes, it may be right to reduce the extra tax relief given to pensioners through the age allowance. For the majority of today's pensioners, however, the state pension is their basic income. It is clear to anyone who meets and talks to pensioners regularly that

their basic pension is not high enough. Those with small occupational pensions often suffer even more deprivation because they are denied access to the benefits that may be claimed by those with no additional pension.

We must consider seriously the provision for poor pensioners. To achieve a better allocation of resources is not just a question of giving more money. We must change the structure to make claiming a more straightforward and simplified matter, with less stigma attached to it. The answer must lie in the integration of the tax and benefit systems. Only by aggregating everyone's earnings and benefit entitlement can a sensitive assessment of net tax burden or net benefit entitlement be made. An integrated system is perfectly feasible within a computerised Inland Revenue. That would eliminate the "churning" of revenue that results in the Government giving with one hand and taking back with the other. For the population as a whole it would ensure that people did not become worse off by taking on work and subsequently losing benefit. Within such a system provision for poor pensioners should be a priority.

Mr. Butterfill: The system that the hon. Lady has adumbrated has some merit. Would it involve withdrawing universal benefit such as child benefit?

Mrs. Barnes: No. My party strongly defends child benefit. It was, in part, a tax concession that was taken away from the main earner in the family and given to the caring parent, usually the mother. Time does not permit me to take that argument further this evening.

Other measures that we advocate, particularly for the elderly, include the miserly £10 bonus at Christmas. We believe that a double pension should be given the week before Christmas. We should also seriously consider abolishing the standing charges on gas, electricity and telephones, which hit the elderly particularly hard.

The issue today is not how much the system costs but how effective it is. Does it fairly do the job it was set up to do? No one believes that any increase below the level of inflation will do anything other than make people poorer. There has been some indictment today of the use of anecdotes, but those who have made such criticisms should remember that anecdotes represent people who are suffering and that they are symptomatic of some of the failings of the system. They highlight the gaps which we must plug.

On Friday night, a constituent, a single parent with three children, came to me. She is a diabetic and, because her eldest child has just turned 16, her income has fallen from £72·96 a week to £46·31. Her 16-year-old son has not yet got a job. Her doctor sent a letter to tell me that she may be hospitalised because her diabetes is getting out of control as she is eating badly. How can I explain to my constituent just how fair and compassionate the Government are? Such anecdotes represent people. They may represent the minority, but they are suffering, and they deserve the attention and a share of the resources of this country.

6.36 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I shall confine my remarks to a few basic truths about the basic pension. A country is judged on the way in which it treats its pensioners and that is right, because a decent society should be judged on how it treats its elderly citizens.

There are widely held misconceptions about the basic pension. There is a belief held by the young, including the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mrs. Barnes), that most pensioners have to live on the basic pension. But they do not. Opposition parties complain about the rate of increase in the basic pension and ask whether it is reasonable to expect couples to live on £65·80 a week. The answer is that none do because the basic income support level is above the basic pension. Therefore, any couple on basic pension are entitled to income support and if they are householders they are also entitled to housing benefit.

Opposition Members have complained that one fifth of our elderly population are on income support or receive housing benefit, but that means that four fifths of our pensioners also have occupational pensions or savings, or both. What on earth is the point of raising the basic pension to the level advocated by the Opposition parties? As I said earlier in an intervention, what is the point of spreading the jam so thinly that no one benefits? There are many pensioners who are very rich and what is the point of giving extra help to them? As I said earlier, what is the point of benefiting Lord Forte or the Prime Minister? It is much more sensible to target extra help to those in real need.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose*——

Mr. Favell: No, I shall not give way. With a falling working population and the elderly thankfully living longer, to increase the basic pension would have no purpose and would simply be a waste of money.

6.40 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Our motion refers to the fall in income that has been experienced under the Conservatives by vulnerable groups, including many pensioners, and I remind the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) that many pensioners do not claim the means-tested benefits to which they might be entitled because they are proud and resent the fact that those benefits are means tested. They are among the most vulnerable and needy and they most lose out and resent being deprived of that basic pension increase which is still the most important part of the income of the vast majority of pensioners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) admirably exposed the Government's lamentable record on pensions, and it was plain again, as in the past, that neither the Secretary of State nor his Back Benchers had much in the way of any accurate response to make to refute the points that my hon. Friend made. They had even less to say about the case made on behalf of those whose standard of living not only dropped last year but will drop again this year—those for whom the Prime Minister's recent sweeping assertion that everyone is better off under Conservative rule rang hollow.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston pointed out that every one of those individuals benefiting from or receiving transitional protection, whose difficulties we are highlighting in this debate, and many of whose case histories have been given by my hon. Friends and others, are the people who were untruthfully described by the Prime Minister and other Ministers last year as being no worse off after last year's benefit cuts—some of the 88 per cent. about whom that outrageous claim was made.

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

Indeed, Ministers defended the claim that they were no worse off by saying that they were no worse off because they faced no cash losses. By definition, the Secretary of State either chose not to, or could not, answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston. By definition, every one of those vulnerable individuals whose cases have been highlighted in this debate were among those whom the Prime Minister said were no worse off, though their income rose at most by £1·30 and their bills alone, including in most cases their rate and water rate bills, rose by far more. They have since faced the rise in gas and electricity prices without a penny more. That was last year. This year, 600,000 of them again get not a penny more, while another 500,000 or so will get some increase, but not the full increase needed to meet price rises in November and which are already out of date.

The Government's response to the plight of those people is to talk about something else. The Government are hoping that if they shut their eyes tightly enough and for long enough they will all go away, and that if the Government shout loudly enough and long enough, mouthing one set of meaningless or manipulated figures after another, either those people will not be heard or they will not be believed. But Opposition Members are determined that they will be heard because they have a right to be heard.

It is bad enough that we have a Government who are so uncaring and deceitful that they are prepared to cut the standard of living of the most vulnerable people in the country and call it targeting on those in the greatest need. They do not even have the guts to admit that that is what they have done. To the injury of increased struggle they add the insult of pretending that it is not happening.

The Conservative case is that they are doing more than any previous Government. It is certainly true that the Conservatives have had the opportunity. No Government in history have had a windfall gain such as that of North sea oil—revenues secured for them by the Labour Government whom they succeeded, who did not believe in throwing away the nation's assets—*[Interruption.]* It is all very well for Conservative Members to laugh. If the policies of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) had been pursued by the last Labour Government there would have been no North sea oil revenues for them to throw away. But that opportunity, like those assets, has been squandered.

Indeed, almost every penny of the increased expenditure of which the Secretary of State spoke—spending in real terms of which the Government boast—is due not to more generous benefits but to increased numbers forced to draw them. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) pointed out, there are more people unemployed, more people reaching retirement, more living longer in retirement and showing increased frailty and more with some disability who can no longer find work under Conservative rule. Only three times in 10 years have the Conservatives given a real increase in benefits over and above that required by inflation-proofing, and even those amounts were usually tiny.

If the Conservatives have been so generous, how did it happen that 600,000 people did not get a penny more this year for the second year running, with no cost of living increase? Whose fault was it that there was no increase in child benefit for 12 million children and no increase of any kind for the upkeep of nearly 8 million of them? What wicked fairy brought about the reduction in case load that meant that 1 million people lost all help with their rent and rates?

We have had a further indication today of the generosity of the Government. I refer to a report in today's *Glasgow Times* about the handling of deductions from the income support of people who are refusing to pay the poll tax deductions to which the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) referred. A memo sent to all DSS offices in Scotland has been leaked to the *Glasgow Times*. It states:

"In deciding whether a deduction can be made"—

for the poll tax—

"the adjudication officer will ensure that there is sufficient Income Support to allow for the deduction to be made in full whilst leaving 10p in payment to the claimant."

That is 10p a week, and of course it must be left in payment to the claimant because that is the law. That is the generosity of the Government.

I understand that over the weekend the Minister of State was reported as saying that when a new system of benefits such as this was introduced it was inevitable that there would be losers. That was obviously in the Whips' Office briefing because several Conservative Members have referred to it.

The Minister was talking nonsense. We know how the Prime Minister fancies that she is the Queen. Is it now the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State who considers herself or himself to be Moses? Was it divine revelation written on tablets of stone that there were bound to be losers, or were those just the instructions handed down by No. 10 and the Treasury?

There are bound to be losers because that has been decided by the Government. They chose it. It is not the product of some natural or divine law. It is certainly not divine law that the losers should be found among the elderly, the poor, the halt and the lame. That sounds much more like the woman who thought that the only thing that mattered about the Good Samaritan was that he had money in his pocket, not that he was prepared to spend it on the unfortunate. The victim was lucky that the Prime Minister did not pass by, or he would have got a brisk lecture on the value of standing on his own two feet.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston pointed out, the Department has been throwing away sources of income that could have been used to make sure that there did not have to be losers. He referred to the supplement that every Government have made for 40 years, the supplement from tax revenues to make sure that decent pensions could be paid to the elderly and the disabled.

In 1980-81, £4·5 billion came from tax revenues for that purpose, but this coming year there will not be a penny, not because it is divine or natural or any kind of law other than that made by the Government, but because this Administration decided that it was money that the pensioners and the disabled did not need. In their view, they were already too well off.

The Government's attitude to the erosion of transitional protection is, in some ways, the most puzzling of all. Why are the Government prepared to defend a cut in the standard of living of the elderly, the sick and the

least well-off families, a standard of living that even the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) described as buying simplification at too great a cost?

A parliamentary answer that I received suggested that the full uprating of income support for which the motion calls could have been provided for about £70 million. In October, as the Government amendment to the motion records, they are spending three times as much to save the Chancellor's face and divert attention away from his long-term plans to means-test benefits such as child benefit, the Christmas bonus and—as the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) was good enough to confirm—even the basic state pension. If the Government can find £200 million to help out the Chancellor, the money could have been found to uprate those benefits where transitional protection was being paid when the overall uprating was calculated.

The Government amendment proudly asserts the huge success of their economic policies. In other words, the Government are not saying that they could not have found the extra money. Why is it so important for them to push through these cuts, comparatively minor by the Government's standards and doubly difficult to defend? What principle is at stake?

Since the changes of April last year the Government have tried to insist that they have made no real or significant cuts. Every example to the contrary has been decried and denied. In particular, they have insisted that if any problems were inadvertently created, it was all in the cause of targeting the help still given on those in the greatest need.

What could more surely reveal the phoneyness and dishonesty of that case than the existence alongside a growing band of new claimants of a group, however small or fast diminishing, of people whose problems, sickness or distress were identical in all major respects but who got much more money because their benefit level under the old system was permanently protected?

When the woeful inadequacy of many new benefit levels becomes apparent by comparing people's needs with their resources, what will more dramatically blow the gaff on the Government's case than a simple straightforward comparison between what is paid now and what used to be paid? We can all write the script. Mrs A gets the old level of benefit but under the new scheme Mrs. B, if she becomes ill or is injured, will receive less money every week. What could more starkly prove what we know to be the truth, which is that the Government believe that 1 million of our most vulnerable people were too well off last April? Although the Government were prepared to see the standard of living of those people fall, they are a bit squeamish about admitting it. People might even have remembered that two weeks earlier the same Government had lavished tax cuts on the wealthy.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I do not have time. I would have given way if the hon. Gentleman had asked me earlier.

The debate is taking place not because justice and fair treatment for the 1 million people who have not received a full uprating or any at all cannot be afforded, but because that would expose the sham and the meanness of Government policy. The hardship of those people is the price of concealment.

6.50 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I am delighted to know that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) listens to my weekend broadcasts. I do not resile for a moment from saying that I approached the debate with some relish, although the relish is slightly diminished because in my winding-up speech I have to deal with the statistical argument between the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I utterly refute the Opposition accusation that my right hon. Friend intended to mislead the House. The statistics quoted by the hon. Member for Livingston and those quoted by my right hon. Friend are simply different statistics. Both sets of statistics are accurate and acceptable in their own way, and the House can judge which set is more relevant to the debate. Having looked at both sets of statistics, I have no doubt where the right answer lies.

The hon. Member for Livingston obtained his figures from the Library and they relate to the basic state pension calculated as a proportion of male earnings. My right hon. Friend's figures were from the 1986 family expenditure survey and compare total state benefits with average manual earnings. The difference in the two sets of figures is easily explained. It is not the basic state pension that matters to pensioners, but their total income—in this case from state benefits. Those may include a whole range of benefits apart from the basic state pension. The important point about the statistics is that they contain figures about actual people with actual incomes. The figures supplied by the Library and quoted by the hon. Gentleman describe the pensioner equivalent of that well-known figure the person with 2·3 children. Such figures are an abstraction rather than a representation of the reality of what is happening.

Now that the hon. Member for Livingston has listened to my explanation and has reconsidered the matter, I hope that he will share my preference for the figures quoted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Gentleman will read what I have said. If he cares to write to me about the matter, I shall be perfectly happy to conduct the argument by correspondence. I am certain that we have the right answer.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) accused the Government of abysmal failure in running the social security system. Let us consider what has happened to total benefits under the Government. In 1988-89 the total benefit figure was calculated at £45·2 billion—a real increase of £10·9 billion since 1978-79. That increase was due to many factors, such as a real terms increase in the average amount paid accounting for about £3·9 billion, and increased numbers of beneficiaries accounting for about £7 billion, of which £2·2 billion was accounted for by extra unemployment. Over the same period, social security spending rose from 25·6 per cent. to 31 per cent. of public expenditure. That is what the right hon. Gentleman describes as abysmal failure. In fact, it shows a successful economy generating money for extra expenditure on people who need help.

The right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South takes a special interest in the disabled and their entitlement to benefit. He knows as well as I do that in the past 10 years there has been a 90 per cent. increase in benefits for disabled people, a real terms increase of no less than £3·5 billion. The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that £3

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

billion of that was due to increased take-up and that about £500 million was due to the increased level of benefits. The numbers of disabled people did not suddenly multiply when we came to office. Those people were there when the Labour Government were in office but they were not getting benefits then. They are getting benefits now, and that must surely be right.

Mr. Ashley: The Minister now admits that the Government are wrong to claim that all the money has gone to increase the individual incomes of disabled people because the larger numbers of disabled people mean that it is a small increase for individual disabled people.

Mr. Scott: The Government have never made any such assertion—certainly not while I have been in my present post, and none of my predecessors has done so. We have never said that the figures were anything other than those that I have just given—and those figures can not only be defended but applauded.

With his tongue firmly in his cheek the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South asked me to prophesy our reaction to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys reports and the nature of the review that we intend to conduct when we finally receive those reports. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to be patient and to await the arrival of the remaining four reports. I do not think that he could expect any other answer.

Without unduly delaying any action that might flow from our consideration of those reports, we shall want to find some way in which disabled organisations and perhaps hon. Members can make their views known as to the most appropriate way forward. We shall then take those views into account before making up our mind.

The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) raised a specific case, and was not the only hon. Member to do so. I make it a general rule not to reply to questions about individual cases across the Floor of the House because it is difficult to establish the basic facts, but I will look at the case that the hon. Lady put forward. I can tell her that the package for poorer pensioners introduced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will provide a second uprating this year for poorer pensioners and that the October uprating will not erode transitional protection. We have made special arrangements to make sure of that. I hope that the hon. Lady will draw that to the attention of her constituent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) endorsed the simplicity of the new system but seemed to argue that we should return to the complexities of the additional requirements which existed under the supplementary benefits system. I remind him and the House that the additional requirements were complex and needed a great deal of intrusive questioning to ascertain the amount to which people were entitled. We got rid of those complexities and replaced them with a severe disablement premium. With Government money we established the independent living fund so that the needs of people with exceptional requirements could be met, thus preventing such people from being institutionalised rather than supported in the community. Those people were helped in a compassionate and flexible manner and the independent living fund has turned out to be a considerable success.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: I have much regard for the hon. Gentleman but I have two minutes in which to complete the winding-up speech. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not give way.

When I saw the Opposition motion, I could hardly believe my eyes. It is now 12 months since the introduction of the reforms——

Mr. Rowlands: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No. I shall read carefully what the hon. Gentleman has said and I shall write to him because the argument is complex.

When I first saw the Opposition motion, I could hardly believe my eyes. Twelve months after the introduction of the reforms and all the predictions of dire consequences flowing from them, the Opposition have laboured mightily and brought forth a mouse. At the weekend I heard a commentator say that in preparing to mount their attack on the Government the Labour Opposition had decided to concentrate their forces on a broad front—not a military tactic with which I am familiar—but it may be that they have had second thoughts on that and decided to concentrate on a much narrower target today. Perhaps this is because, as successive commentators have recognised and as most hon. Members recognise, they know that when we get away from the minority of individual hard cases—I accept that hard cases exist—the overwhelming success of our reforms is manifest.

The motion concentrates on two points—the way in which pensions are calculated, and the transitional protection. With regard to the first, the Opposition make two points—first, about the date of the calculation and, secondly, about whether it should be linked to earnings and prices. We have given a commitment to link it to prices and we have fulfilled that obligation. The Labour party had a variety of devices linking it to earnings or moving to the forecasting method.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) very effectively explained in his opening remarks the criticisms that were levelled against the Labour Government at the time. Further on in that debate the hon. Member then for Coventry, South-West—now the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise)—made it clear why that change had been made when she said:

> "In April 1976, when the changed basis of calculation was announced, it was clear that the change was brought into being because it was advantageous to the Government at that stage and saved £500 million compared with what would have been required for that pension uprating to keep in line with the historic costs of inflation."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1979; vol. 964, c. 236.]

That was the record of the Labour Government.

We have given pledges and we have honoured them, and we shall continue to do so. We have honoured our commitment to monitor these reforms and to make changes where necessary in housing benefit and with regard to poorer pensioners, widows, 16 and 17-year-olds and hostels, and we shall continue to do so. The fundamental structure, however, is right and I commend the Government amendment to the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 220, Noes 308.

Division No. 153] **[7.02 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nigel Griffiths and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy

Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heddle, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes that it is now one year since the Government introduced a simpler, fairer, more flexible system of income-related benefits and that the uprating which took place yesterday added a further £2·2 billion to spending on social security, now running at £51 billion a year; and congratulates the Government on the success of its economic policies which have enabled it not only to fulfil the pledge to maintain the value of the basic retirement pension in line with price movements but also to use the new system of income-related benefits to direct additional help this year of over a quarter of a billion pounds beyond the normal uprating to those in greatest need.

Construction Industry (Safety)

7.15 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, alarmed that the number of fatal and major accidents on building sites is up by two-thirds since 1981, and noting the Government's responsibility in encouraging relentless commercial pressures whilst at the same time failing to enforce safety standards, fully supports the efforts of workers and trade unions in the industry to press for higher health and safety standards; and calls upon the Government to increase inspection, improve site management and enforce tougher penalties that counter effectively profit pressures and managerial negligence.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Meacher: The Opposition have chosen to debate safety in the construction industry because it represents a microcosm of the rising toll of preventable carnage that has affected all our industries over the last 10 years. The facts are not in dispute. Last year 157 building workers were killed on site, nearly one quarter of them in London alone. The number of fatal and major accidents is up by no less than two thirds on 1981, and on average a construction worker is killed or seriously injured every hour and less serious accidents occur every two minutes. Those are Government figures. They are shocking enough, but, by concentrating on the immediate causes of fatal and major accidents, even those figures ignore the far greater number of construction-related deaths, as many as 4,000 a year, caused later by bronchitis, cancer and other diseases of dust and lousy working conditions.

The Health and Safety Executive lays the blame for all this with the employers. According to "Blackspot Construction", the publication of the Health and Safety Executive in June last year, 90 per cent. of deaths on building sites could have been prevented, and at least 70 per cent. were directly due to the negligence of management. The Government accept no responsibility. With regard to building sites, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State told the House earlier this year, with mind-blowing complacency, that he was

"confident the law is already being enforced stringently."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1989; Vol. 145, c. *168*.]

Let us consider the facts. There are only 85 construction inspectors for the entire country. In London there are only 12 who have to cover 200,000 building sites, so that each inspector is responsible for 17,000 building sites. If that is what the Under-Secretary calls stringent enforcement of the law, let us compare it with the near doubling of the number of social security fraud inspectors by the Government. If only the Government were as anxious to stop death and serious injury in the workplace as they are to stop benefit fraud, we would not have half the number of accidents.

How can the Minister seriously claim that the law is being enforced stringently when in London last year there were 36 deaths on construction sites and 413 major injuries, but there were only 18 prosecutions? The average fine was a piffling £1,050, scarcely even pocket money for some major construction firms. How is the law being enforced stringently when no action was taken on more than half the sites where a death or major injury occurred?

In their amendment the Government have found only two measures which they have taken to halt the rising toll of death and serious injury and those are enforcement blitzes and publicity campaigns—*[Interruption.]* I am surprised that Conservative Members are so disinterested in this subject and the rising roll call of death that they find it amusing to talk of other matters when this high level of carnage is happening in the industry as a result of the Government's omissions.

Clearly the news has not trickled through to the Secretary of State for Employment that enforcement blitzes and publicity campaigns have been dismissed as inadequate by the Health and Safety Executive. The HSE notes about publicity that there was no improvement in site safety where the agent or supervisor knew of the blitz campaign compared with where they did not. The HSE also refuted the Secretary of State's claims in the Government's amendment by concluding:

"Clearly even a high level of publicity does not on its own achieve improved safety on sites."

We await further proposals from the Government about these problems, but so far they have produced none.

The Government fair no better with their blitz campaigns. The HSE found that there was no significant reduction in death and serious injury on construction sites during the campaigns. That is a pretty sobering conclusion. The HSE also found that the issuing of prohibition notices during the two years of blitzes also revealed no significant improvement in site safety. That is not the Labour party view; it is the view of the HSE. So much for the way in which the Government hyped the blitzes as a great success.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): With regard to publicity and the Government taking these matters seriously, the Government do not even appear to be taking this debate seriously, because the Secretary of State for Employment is not going to answer these very important points about safety on construction sites. He is too busy creating mayhem in the docks.

Mr. Meacher: Anyone watching our proceedings and seeing that there are only seven or eight Conservative Back Benchers here, compared with many more Labour Members, will draw the right conclusion about the importance which the Government attach to health and safety. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) is aware, when the Secretary of State for Employment made his statement about the dock labour scheme the Conservative Benches were full to brimming because the Conservatives want confrontation. They are not interested in health and safety.

There would be a real difference in the position if there were proper deterrent penalties. However, the Secretary of State will not impose such penalties. On 6 January *The Independent* reported:

"Mr. Fowler does not support calls for top company personnel to be jailed where health and safety has been flouted. He hoped safety breaches would be taken 'very seriously indeed' by the courts"

even though he knows that there is abundant evidence that that will not happen. *The Independent* continued quoting the Secretary of State, who said:

"I do not think we should go to the lengths of sending people to prison."

Perhaps we should not go to the lengths of sending people to their deaths on manifestly unsafe building sites. *The Independent* continued:

[Mr. Meacher]

"His department was 'looking at' the use of television to advertise the safety message. The medium has been heavily used to promote Government training schemes."

That is certainly true. Obviously the Secretary of State can find £4 million to revive his flagging employment training programme, but that only involves taking people off the unemployment register. When it comes to paying for media coverage to save people's lives, the Secretary of State is only "looking at" the matter. What a stark difference.

Our case is not just that the Government's record on health and safety in the construction industry is limp and feeble, even though it certainly is; it is much more serious than that. In their amendment, the Government conveniently place all the blame on

"employers and others on site;"

Our central contention is that the Government have wilfully generated a commercial climate in which employers are forced to make a choice between getting business and safety, and workers are forced to make a choice between keeping their jobs and safety—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the Secretary of State for Employment has finally decided to join us. However, we are disappointed to learn that he does not regard health and safety as sufficiently important to address the House and has delegated this task to his junior.

By encouraging a climate of unrelenting commercial pressure while failing to enforce safety standards, the Government have undermined 100 times over such small health and safety intitiatives as they have taken. The climate of intensified competition, of reduced contract times and heavy penalty clauses for delay have helped to squeeze health and safety out of money contracts.

Mr. Len Dodds, the chief safety adviser to Balfour Beatty, one of our major construction firms, has said:

"It does appear that to obtain a satisfactory safety performance on major construction projects a minimum figure of between 6-7 per cent. of total labour costs should be allowed . . . Responsible contracting companies have been seriously disadvantaged by the cowboy element in our industry under-cutting prices, which inevitably means ignoring safety provisions."

In other words, the untrammelled commercial pressures unleashed by the Government, combined with their abject failure to enforce proper safety standards, have, according to a senior construction executive, caused the safety margin to be squeezed out. That is the essence of our charge against the Government.

There is an estimated £12 billion worth of building work going on at present in London and the south-east, a much higher level than for many years. Clients are taking advantage of the current no holds barred business climate to demand completion from contractors in record time. However, at the same time, more building workers are self-employed and at the mercy of the casualisation of the industry which has created a huge hire and fire labour turnover.

The truth is not the Government's facile view about the causes of the rising level of accidents. The root of the worsening record of the construction industry lies in the lack of training. In the White Paper published last November the Government are once again reviving the proposal to end the construction industry training board. The roots of the problem lie with the failure to enforce current safety legislation, the increase in casual labour, the decline in union membership, which the Government have done their best to encourage, the increasing fragmentation of the industry and the growth in sub-contracting.

The Secretary of State's response to all that has been pitifully narrow minded. The Government are planning to make the wearing of hard hats compulsory on construction sites. That response was given on 17 January. No one would disagree with that; it should have been done many years ago. However, it completely misses the point about the wider structural causes of the rising toll of death and serious injury. The Government's only concession is contained in the statement made by the Under-Secretary of State for Employment, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), on 17 January when he said:

"Health and Safety Executive inspectors will also be paying more attention to the quality of site management and its ability to manage health and safety."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1989; Vol. 145, c. 147.]

That is a noticeably vague statement. What he does not say is how that is to have any cutting edge when each inspector in London has to deal with 17,000 building sites apiece.

I want to make it clear to the House that the Labour party gives a far higher priority to health and safety than do the Thatcherite Government with their unfettered commercialism. I want to spell out briefly a seven-point programme which would transform the appalling safety record which the Secretary of State's current laxity has produced.

First, we will bring forward a charter for employees which will give equal status to all workers, part time as well as full time, which cannot be signed away on the demand of an employer for a new contract or, as with the lump, ignored because there is no contract. Under our proposals, all workers currently employed as lump labour will be covered by basic rights on pay, conditions of work, employment practices and health and safety. In effect, the lump will no longer exist and one of the fundamental causes of the worsening accident record in construction will be removed.

Secondly, we will increase the number and the role of the inspectorate and union safety representatives. On larger sites safety representatives should be full time. If convenors are in larger firms, why not safety representatives on larger sites? We shall also introduce the important concept of roving safety representatives who will have the right to inspect any site in their area either at their own instigation or on the invitation of those who work on that site. For the first time, that will give a measure of safety to building workers who believe that their lives are being put at risk by dangerous working conditions.

Thirdly, we will outlaw blacklisting. According to the booklet entitled "Against Democracy: the True Story of the Economic League", which was published last year, Service Group companies, contruction's self-sufficient organisation within the Economic League,

"just call people 'troublemakers' . . . blacklisting on grounds of health and safety activity is the most common thing."

Instead of that disgraceful state of affairs where people are victimised simply because they complain about inadequate health and safety provision, we shall guarantee the right of individual workers to be represented by trade unions on a number of issues, including health and safety.

Fourthly, we will use contract compliance to ensure that at least minimum health and safety standards are

always adhered to in the awarding of Government contracts and, indeed, on all public contracts which involve public expenditure.

Fifthly, we will make it clear that responsibility for site safety is placed squarely on the main contractor, whatever the management arrangements on a particular site. That is of great importance because it effectively remedies the present dissipation of control and responsibility where there is a series of sub-contractors. The Health and Safety Executive regards that as one of the major causes of rising accidents.

That also provides an answer to something that the Secretary of State should be considering—the alarming finding by the Health and Safety Executive that on one in every five sites visited there was no site agent and no supervisor available. Our measure would provide an answer to that by squarely putting the responsibility where it should lie—on the client and the main contractor.

Sixthly, we shall see that the Health and Safety Commission takes a stronger line. I know from my contacts that many inspectors would wish it so to do. We shall require the commission to record its decisions and to make them publicly available in order to discourage employer representatives from seeking to veto safety initiatives. We shall also encourage the executive to prosecute senior management under its powers under section 37 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to appeal against light sentences—the Government are perfectly prepared to do that in other cases, so why not for health and safety?—and to invite the police to make manslaughter charges in cases of gross neglect.

Seventhly, penalties for negligence that causes death or serious injury must be tough enough to counter powerful commercial pressures, as I have outlined. At present, fines are laughable, if not insulting to the families of those who die or who are maimed. For example, Balfour Beatty, whose pre-tax profits for 1987 were £130 million, was fined just £2,700 after being found criminally guilty of three health and safety offences on three occasions during 1986. That is rather like using a nut to crack a sledgehammer. Such fines are pathetic and inadequate.

The horrific level of deaths and maimings at work will be reversed only by making negligent management liable to hefty gaol sentences. Dangerous driving that kills is subject to the punishment of a gaol sentence and dangerous management in the workplace that kills should be similarly punished, as it is already in the United States, Italy and Sweden.

We agree with Dr. John Cullen, the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, who last month said:

"I believe that there have been circumstances where employers should have been jailed . . . I think that a jail sentence would help concentrate the minds of employers who might not be carrying out their duties under health and safety laws."

Only the Secretary of State is ready to send people to prison for benefit fraud, but not employers who cause other people's death at work.

We have a programme to match our determined commitment to higher health and safety standards. It represents a huge advance on the facile and cosmetic approach of the Government who, whenever there is a choice, put profit above safety every time. We may well make life harder for negligent employers—a few famous collars in jug would work wonders for health and safety—but it would be a small price to pay for safeguarding the lives and limbs of millions of our working people.

7.37 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. John Cope): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'deploring the high accident rate on construction sites and noting that 90 per cent. of construction accidents are preventable, recognises that the prime responsibility for safety lies with employers and others on site; acknowledges the vigorous action which the Health and Safety Commission and Executive have taken through enforcement blitzes and publicity campaigns on construction safety; and welcomes the increased provision which the Government has made available to the Health and Safety Executive thereby enabling the Executive to increase the number of inspectors employed on construction work.'.

It may surprise the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to learn that I very much welcome the debate and the opportunity that it gives to draw attention to the dangers of the construction industry and what is being done about it, but I deplore the hon. Gentleman's efforts to twist those dangers into political point scoring. The hon. Gentleman is hopelessly over the top in his political invective. We are used to that. It is so normal that I was able to write that firmly into my speech without even listening to him. As usual, it damages his case—which I do not mind—but today it also damages the message that should go out from the House which should be one of clear and universal support for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive in what they are doing to reduce the carnage in the construction industry.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, for more than 15 years we have had a health and safety regime, run by the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive. Parliament made the HSC the primary body in health and safety, recommending legislation and enforcing the laws we pass. The HSC's work, quite rightly, is based on elaborate consultation, and it has a whole family of committees, both technical and consultative. The HSC and those committees have on them representatives of trade unions as well as employers and others. It is very important that the HSC and HSE have the backing not only of Ministers—which they have, in full—but of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House.

The consultative procedure is sometimes slow but it delivers wide support for the measures that it produces, and that is valuable. Opposition Members should welcome that and support the HSC if they value it, because consultation is an essential prerequisite of safety at work on construction sites and elsewhere. It is the people on site—management and employees—who can do most to improve safety. However, there is no doubt that it needs improving.

There are too many accidents and deaths on construction sites. As the hon. Gentleman said, in 1987-88 there were 157 deaths—about one in three of work-related fatalities—and many more accidents resulting in injuries. Some were serious while others, thankfully, were less so. That adds up to waste, inefficiency and lost time. More importantly, it adds up to a catalogue of pain, suffering and grief.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): At least the Minister has got the order right, for a Conservative.

Mr. Cope: More importantly, everyone concerned must recognise that construction and demolition work is inherently dangerous. A building site is essentially a temporary workplace. Its condition, by definition, changes day by day, with different tradesmen arriving at the site and leaving it daily. It has a changing population and changing conditions to a much greater extent than does a factory or other fixed site. However, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West also said very fairly, many of the 157 deaths were avoidable. Last year's report by the Health and Safety Executive, "Blackspot Construction", from which the hon. Gentleman quoted, showed that about 90 per cent. of fatal accidents are preventable. If basic precautions had been taken and common sense prevailed, perhaps 140 of those 157 people would still be alive today.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West tried to make political capital out of all that, but he knows as well as I do that the figures for major accidents are affected by improvements in reporting requirements introduced at the suggestion of the HSC and approved by the House. However, the figures for fatal accidents are much clearer. The average number of deaths in construction is down under this Government by comparison with the last Labour Government. I do not crow about that, because I want the figure to be lower. Nevertheless, it was a bad political point for the hon. Gentleman to make. That is also true of his remarks about inspectors. In 1979, 86 inspectors were engaged on construction work. I do not suppose that the hon. Gentleman intended to mislead the House, but he did so—for today there are 99 inspectors, representing a 15 per cent. increase. It is for the HSE and HSC, not Ministers, to decide on the number of inspectors required for that work.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Does the Minister condone the fact that the Government fund six times as many dole snoopers in London as they do factory inspectors? Where do the Government's priorities lie?

Mr. Cope: The hon. Member can always be relied upon to introduce a red herring into the debate, and he has done so on this occasion.

The long-term drop in accidents is welcome, but it is not enough.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): I am sure that the Minister does not intend to mislead the House, but although it is true that inspectors have been moved from other duties to construction work, it is also true that for four years under the present Government the recruitment of factory inspectors was stopped, and there are fewer inspectors today than there were 10 years ago. More inspectors may have been moved to construction, but the Minister knows that no inspectors were recruited for four years and that their number was cut. If I catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall give the House the relevant figures.

Mr. Cope: The hon. Gentleman can give the House those figures, if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is true that the number of factory inspectors is lower than it was 10 years ago, but it is also true that the figure is rising. It is true also that the shadow Cabinet, in its wisdom, presumably advised by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, chose to debate construction safety, where the number of inspectors has increased by 15 per cent. and where the average number of deaths under a Conservative Government has been fewer than under Labour. That was the Opposition's choice, not ours, and that is the basis of the debate.

The reduction in the number of fatal construction accidents is welcome, but it is not enough. The most important finding of the studies mentioned is that 90 per cent. of fatal accidents examined were avoidable. The hon. Gentleman may pour cold water on this, but we believe that the first essential is to make people aware of the dangers and of how to avoid them. That is why we encouraged the excellent new literature produced by the HSC and HSE. It is well produced and covers every level. Some of it is highly technical, and some of it popular in format. All of it is valuable in increasing awareness, and so are the specific campaigns—the "blitzes"—run by the inspectorate. Also valuable were the special visits paid by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to construction sites, to draw the attention of the media to the necessity for safety. So is the special book for small firms that I had the honour to launch a couple of months ago jointly with John Banham of the Confederation of British Industry and Norman Willis of the Trades Union Congress. We want the message to go out loud and clear that 90 per cent. of fatal construction accidents are preventable.

Awareness alone is not enough. Training is also important, and that is why I welcome the emphasis placed by the construction industry training board, big companies and large sections of the industry on training. As it happens, today sees the launch of a new initiative by the Open College and the CITB. The House will be aware of the renewed support for the Open College that I announced recently. Today, it announced two new courses, "A Site more Safe" and "A Site Better Off". They are both multimedia courses that make use of audio and video tapes as well as an associated television series that will be broadcast on Channel 4 from 20 April. Open learning is particularly suitable given the irregular lifestyle of those working in the construction industry, and I am sure that those new courses will be very valuable.

For those who do not get the message, there remains the force of the law. The key power of construction inspectors —the difference between them and other safety experts —lies in their enforcement powers. During their construction blitz, inspectors issued more than 2,000 prohibition notices. Such notices are important and can prove expensive for the employers concerned.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the Minister acknowledge how important it is that employees receive information about site safety? But how will the Minister deal with the problem that when workers make complaints they are placed on a blacklist?

Mr. Cope: If the hon. Gentleman can produce evidence of people being blacklisted for reasons connected with safety, I shall certainly look into it. So far, I have seen no such evidence.

In 1987-88, 2,874 prohibition notices were issued in construction. I remarked that they can prove expensive for the employers concerned. They are also immediate in their effect. They can be used immediately to close down whatever piece of machinery or section of the site against which the notice has been issued. That can close a whole construction site for one day or for several days, while the

matter is put right. That can prove extremely expensive for the employer, and it should not be sneezed at as a quick, direct and forceful method of imposing site safety.

There were also 610 prosecutions last year in the construction industry, which is a considerable increase. The publicity for convictions is considerable and the fine is not always the end of the matter because civil proceedings often follow. Nor should any manager or supervisor imagine that the fine will apply only to the company. A fortnight ago, in north Wales, there was a court case following a fatal accident at a steel erection site. The site agent and the senior foreman were each fined £2,000, as well as a fine being imposed on the company.

The levels of fines imposed are a matter for the courts in individual cases, but anyone who thinks that his company can afford a fine, and does not need to bother about it, should remember two factors. First, BP was recently fined £500,000 and £250,000 on the same day—it was not for a construction accident but the law was the same. That is the highest fine so far imposed, but it does not mean that higher fines will not be imposed in other cases. Secondly, there is clear evidence that safe sites are profitable sites. That is not a matter for speculation but a demonstrable phenomenon.

The specific regulations on construction under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 are considerable.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Is it not true that, in this country, no employer who has been found guilty of negligence that has caused a fatal accident on a building site has ever been imprisoned for criminal negligence? Should not such employers be sentenced? If it is their fault that a worker dies, is it not true that only imprisonment will make them take the matter seriously? When great profits are at stake, fines of £400, or even £2,000, will not improve the position.

Mr. Cope: I was drawing attention to a fine of £750,000. However, suspended prison sentences have been passed in the past and may well be passed in the future. That is a matter for the courts.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister has mentioned a variety of sums. Does he know from his own experience and knowledge whether one can insure against such fines? Does he favour legislation to ensure that one could not insure against such fines?

Mr. Cope: I cannot give an authoritative answer about whether the fines are insurable, although I doubt it. I shall certainly look into the matter and, if possible, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will respond to that point.

There are many specific regulations on construction under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, as well as the broad and effective provisions of the Act itself. However, the HSC and the HSE are working up new regulations—a fact which, I was glad to see, had penetrated the mind of the hon. Member for Oldham, West—which will take account of modern conditions and fill some gaps where the present law is less demanding than it should be.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West referred to the compulsory wearing of safety helmets. We have received prospective regulations from the Health and Safety Commission and shall soon lay them before the House for the House to decide on them. Those regulations would make it compulsory to wear safety helmets on construction sites.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): I have had correspondence with the Minister concerning Sikhs in the building industry. The legislation would affect a devout Sikh, although not one who has given up the turban wearing with the long hair on top—which, I should say to the Minister, is to be recommended as a measure of safety if hair can be grown on top. I successfully introduced a Bill on turbans, helmets and motor cycling. The House took the view that it was right to make a religious exemption for turbaned Sikhs. Therefore, I hope that the House will support such an exemption in a measure that applies to building sites because turbaned Sikhs would have to leave the building industry if the legislation were enforced universally. If necessary, I shall be happy to provide such

Mr. Cope: No doubt we shall come to that debate at some point. The Health and Safety Commission, which considered the matter and had public consultation on it, recommended that there should be no exception for turbaned Sikhs. However, we are considering that matter, as, no doubt, the House will wish to do in due course. I am conscious—as are others—of the Bill relating to motor cycles that the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Bidwell) successfully introduced in Parliament.

With regard to hair on top of the head, I do not think that I am doing any better than the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall, but if he has any suggestions to improve my state I shall consider them carefully.

The regulations involving safety helmets are not the only ones coming forward. Other regulations are also being developed by the commission and the executive—the right place for them to be developed—with the active co-operation of trade unions, employers and others involved in the Health and Safety Commission and the consultative process. Those in the pipeline include regulations to require more short-term but high-risk activities to be notified to the inspectorate. At the moment, the inspectorate must be notified if sites are likely to last longer than six weeks—the length of time is one measure of the importance of the site, but certain high-risk activities may last less than six weeks.

Other regulations are being considered to extend the requirement for safety supervisors to smaller companies —at present the number of employees is 20. Regulations are also proposed to provide for better management, and co-ordination on multi-contractor sites, bringing up to date 25-year-old regulations—the hon. Member for Oldham, West picked up this point from the HSC and the HSE.

Each of those proposals will be an important step forward. I understand that the Health and Safety Commission hopes to bring them forward later this year with a view to making the regulations in the course of the next year.

Some attention has recently been drawn to safety on the youth training scheme. About 66,000 young people are on the YTS in the construction industry, 37,000 of them on construction industry training board schemes. I have already explained that construction work is more dangerous than other work. That is also true of construction work done by young people on the YTS as

[Mr. Cope]

compared with other trainees. Our evidence—which is not conclusive—suggests that youth trainees are less at risk than older construction workers. However, that is no reason for complacency; the accident rate is still too high. Tragically, there was one fatality last year involving a 17-year-old electrical trainee who fell from a ladder. I am glad to say that there were no fatalities in 1987 and there have been none so far this year.

As the House knows, we have been re-examining arrangements for ensuring health and safety on the YTS. The basic arrangements are sound. Trainees, like employees, have all the legal protection of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act. Every trainee receives advice and instruction on health and safety matters and they have full insurance. The providers of training—the managing agents—must have effective safety arrangements in order to be awarded a YTS contract. Under the terms of that contract, managing agents must exercise a duty of care towards all their trainees and ensure that training takes place only in premises which have been notified to the Health and Safety Executive or equivalent authorities. They are also contractually obliged to ensure that work experience providers and shop floor training supervisors share in the duty of care, are fully informed of their responsibilities and carry them out conscientiously.

YTS providers are monitored by trained staff of the Training Agency and receive extensive guidance on health and safety. At regional level, its monitoring is overseen by professionally qualified health and safety experts, some of whom are former factory inspectors. Nevertheless, we have decided to institute practical steps to improve awareness and understanding of these important matters and to tighten controls on the providers of training and work experience.

The Training Agency is issuing additional new and improved health and safety guidance, in particular a document entitled "A Good Start to Assessing Placement Safety", for wide distribution to training providers and others. It complements the existing range of documentation. My copy is hot off the press and rather exclusive, but the bulk order will be delivered in the next few days and I shall place copies in the Library.

The Training Agency is making stronger provision in the standard YTS training proposal, which becomes part of the contract if the proposal is accepted, to ensure that each YTS training provider states its monitoring policy clearly in advance. It specifically identifies and monitors agreements that prohibit use of machines or locations by YTS trainees. We are inviting the Health and Safety Executive and other independent experts to examine YTS health and safety arrangements and documentation and to advise us on further improvements.

We are commissioning from independent experts a new study of YTS accidents between April 1986 and March 1989. It follows earlier studies of accidents to young trainees commissioned from consultants at Aston university, which were published in 1985 and 1987. We hope that it will be completed about the turn of the year, and it will of course be published.

Taken together, those measures will strengthen the safety regime in YTS, including the construction industry, but I must stress that the primary legal and moral responsibility remains with managing agents and those in charge of young trainees. We will not give YTS contracts to those who do not have proper safety arrangements. We withdraw the contracts of those who are not carrying out their responsibilities properly. YTS managing agents and training providers are just as liable as employers to prosecution, notices and civil liability when things go wrong.

For safety, Acts, regulations made under them, guidance, inspectors and courts are important, but not as important as the man or woman on the site. Construction is inherently dangerous, but the majority of accidents are avoidable, and that is the message that we must send out. They arise from carelessness, thoughtlessness, lack of planning and lack of attention to equipment. In a moment, a human life can be lost or blighted by disablement. Once that has happened, nothing can restore the position; no fine or inspector can recompense the family. Hon. Members should not trade politics but should back the Health and Safety Commission and its allies.

8.3 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The Minister, as so often in the past, made a statement that I have heard from different people in the construction industry—that the fault for the poor safety record lies with the worker.

Mr. Cope: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman so soon. I said not the worker only, but those on site—it is both.

Mr. Heffer: I assume that most of the people on site are workers, whether they are managerial workers or people doing physical work.

For years, workers in the construction industry have taken risks. Some have been tempted by bonus schemes to cut corners. To earn a little more money in relation to lump labour, some workers have taken risks, sometimes with horrible results. It would be wrong for me to say otherwise. I know the construction industry because I was a carpenter and joiner for many years before I became a Member of Parliament. I do not deny for one moment that some workers will take risks, but those risks arise from the nature and character of an industry in which profits are put before the interests of workers. It comes down to profits being made at the expense of safety. If a mistake is made by a worker, which does not happen often because he will suffer as a result, it is because he is cutting corners because the employer wants to make extra profit by finishing the job more quickly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made an excellent speech, making seven good points on behalf of the Labour party to which I am sure that workers in the industry and trade unions will respond and which give us a positive campaign for which we can fight.

The Minister said that he welcomed the debate. I find that strange. He will remember that I tabled an early-day motion which attracted about 240 signatures—probably the largest number of supporters for such a motion—from hon. Members of all political parties, including two Conservative Members. If the Government thought that their position was so strong and that they had a story to tell, why did not the Leader of the House, whom I asked every Thursday for a debate, rush forward and say, "We have a great story to tell, so we shall have a debate at the earliest possible opportunity"? On every occasion, I was

told, "You cannot have a debate next week, but we shall look into it." We never got round to having a debate, and we are having one this evening only because my right hon. and hon. Friends in the shadow Cabinet have decided to have one on this important issue in Opposition time. I am delighted that the motion is not dissimilar to the one that I tabled.

Safety in the construction industry has always been a problem. I can testify that it is a dangerous industry because I worked in it for many years. The issue of health and safety in the industry is of great importance, to such an extent that workers in the London area, though members of trade unions, have got together with the local authority and ordinary people to launch a construction safety campaign. One of the points they make in their document is "Your health, their wealth", the very point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West and myself—that it is a case of profits before the interests of the people.

What is so tragic is that a worker in the construction industry—it may be a woman nowadays—can leave home in the morning perfectly healthy and not come home because he or she has been killed or maimed. That is a horrible tragedy. It is something that Members of Parliament do not experience—if they do not get home it may be due to a heart attack or the like, but it would not be because of the work that they do here; it would not be because the employer had failed to comply with safety regulations and had put profits before the interests of his work force. Yet that is what happens daily in the construction industry.

The Government amendment rightly says that 90 per cent. of construction accidents are preventable, and that prime responsibility lies with employers. This was pointed out in the early-day motion and in the Opposition motion today. All too often construction workers die or are maimed due to lack of responsibility on the part of the employer. It is therefore right to say that the Government are responsible, by encouraging relentless commercial pressures and at the same time failing to enforce safety standards.

The point is emphasised in the introduction of the Health and Safety Executive document, "Blackspot Construction", published in 1988, which begins by saying:

"During the five year period 1981 to 1985, 739 people were killed by the construction industry. Five hundred and sixty one were employees; 120 were self-employed; 47 were members of the public—including 21 children."

The next point is very important:

"Death comes to construction sites all too often. The industry is among the most dangerous of all industries in the post war period and the post war period of improvement in the annual toll of death has, in recent years, come to an end."

If the improvement has come to an end in recent years, that means in the years of the Tory Government. So when the Minister of State claims that my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West is making political points he is suggesting that his own document is making political points. In fact, this is reality.

The document goes on:

"This and the rising trend in the numbers of serious injuries reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 1981-85 has prompted increasing concern in the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) and its construction industry Advisory Committee (CONIAC)."

Many of the workers killed and maimed in the industry are highly skilled. It is interesting to note that 49 people of managerial and professional status were killed in that period; in my own trade, 37 carpenters and joiners; 19 bricklayers; 13 plumbers and glaziers, and so on. It is not just the labourer digging holes who is affected.

Hon. Members have seen the television programme showing a woman inspector going around various sites. She stopped work at a particular site and had only been off the site for a few moments when they started work again, with the employer telling them they were either back at work or sacked because it was easy to replace them. The inspector had to go back and stop the work again. That was a recent television programme showing what actually goes on in the industry in London.

The situation has not improved since 1985; in fact, it has got worse. In 1977 the number of fatal accidents was 130. The Minister is trying to make out how much better it is now. In 1977 the number of employees in the industry was 1,167,000; in 1987 the number of fatal accidents was 100, but the number of employees in the industry at that time was 984,000—183,000 fewer. If there has been a certain fall-off in the rate of accidents, there has also been a fall-off at certain times in the number of workers in the industry. It is very interesting that the number of self-employed has gone up, with lump labour in particular. In 1981, 11 self-employed workers met with fatal accidents, and there were 40 major injuries. In 1987, 41 self-employed workers were fatally injured and 450 suffered major injuries. In 1981 there were 388,000 self-employed and in 1987 542,000, so it is clear that there is a correlation between the number of self-employed and the number of fatal accidents.

On 1 January 1979, 86 factory inspectors were employed in construction. According to Government figures given to me by the Library of the House, on 1 September 1987 there were 75. To be fair, in addition to the 75 experienced inspectors in 1987, there were a further 17 qualified inspectors. This total of 92 qualified inspectors compares with a total of 90 at the beginning of this year—a number which is unlikely to have changed by September 1989, when the recent public expenditure White Paper envisages that there will also be 90 trained inspectors. It is intended that there will be 100 such inspectors by 1990, but even with those numbers, how on earth are they dealing with the real situation? It is high time that the number of inspectors in the construction industry was doubled. We need not the 100 that the Minister boasts that we shall get but at least 200. Even that would not be enough, but it would be a great improvement on what we have now. Despite the safety blitz, whole sections of the construction industry are without safety supervision. Where trade unions are weak on a site, the employers get away with murder.

More than 2,000 dangerous sites were shut down by factory inspectors during the safety blitz. More than 10,000 contractors on 8,272 sites were inspected. Yet during the year of the blitz, which ended in March 1988, 157 people were killed—including 16 members of the public—and 21,000 people were injured. In London there were 38 deaths. Yet the average fine imposed on the 47 companies brought to court was £837. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said, that is a joke. When will real penalties be imposed? When will people who are criminally negligent be put in prison?

If the Government are so keen to deal with safety in the construction industry, when do they intend to introduce legislation? They are keen to introduce, out of the blue, legislation that affects dock workers. How much better it

[Mr. Heffer]

would be if dockers did not have to consider taking strike action. Instead, we ought to have been welcoming Government action to eliminate death and injury in the construction industry.

The general secretary of my union, Mr. Albert Williams, was right to declare that death caused by employers' neglect should be an indictable offence and that there should be prosecution for corporate manslaughter, but it is cheaper for employers to take the risk of being fined than to pay for the introduction of proper safety standards.

We need far more health and safety inspectors. There should be an elected health and safety representative at every workplace. My trade union is the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians. I am proud to say that I have now served for 50 years in that union, beginning in the old Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, which then merged with UCATT. The former regional secretary of the Merseyside branch of the ASW argued that every member must be his own safety officer, and I agree—where there are good, organised trade union jobs there is collective power to enforce the regulations—but the unions are becoming increasingly weak in certain areas because of the growth of lump labour and individualism. Workers are therefore unable to enforce safety regulations, as they can if there is a good trade union organisation. That is one of the problems in the construction industry.

UCATT is conducting a safe site campaign and has produced an excellent document. *[Interruption.]* Do you mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker? If I speak for half an hour, that is a matter for me, not for you. With all due respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even if I have been speaking for 20 minutes, I am entitled to do so. I do not intend to speak for much longer, but it is not your job to mention to the Whip that I ought to be thinking of sitting down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Gentleman has been called early in the debate. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to speak and time is getting very short.

Mr. Heffer: I will reply to that by telling you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I tabled a motion that carried the names of 240 hon. Members. The debate has arisen from the desire of those who supported the motion that it should take place. I am ending my speech by referring to what my union is doing. It is important that the House of Commons and the country should know that if employers conducted themselves as my trade union conducts itself and as the workers in the industry conduct themselves, there would be fewer accidents and deaths. There would be a little less profit, but that would benefit the workers in the construction industry.

It is not just a question of the safety regulations. There is the question of chemicals, asbestos and wood preservatives on site, and also the problem of noise and the handling of loads. Those issues cannot be brushed aside lightly. More deaths and injuries are caused to workers in the construction industry because of the materials that they work with than happens in any other industry. I make no apology for speaking at length on the issue. It is dear to my heart and to the hearts of many other people. I am part of that industry, even though I have been a Member of Parliament for 25 years. I have fought for a hell of a long time to get the House to discuss safety in the construction industry and I make no apologies for having spoken at length on the subject.

When I was an apprentice, conditions in the industry were little different from those described in "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists". Despite all the technology and the health and safety regulations, when I go on to some sites today I think that conditions there have returned to those described in that book. It is time that the people of this country did something positive about that. That is why I welcome the debate. I hope that the motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West will be carried.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House once more that time is very limited. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House wish to speak. I hope that those who are called will be fair to the others by making brief speeches.

8.28 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) on his 50 years in his union, but he attached great blame to employers and at times to the self-employed. I was disappointed that he did not point out that there is a great need for good training and safety standards to be inculcated at an early stage. I understand that 107 deaths were due to industrial accidents in 1988. Half those tragic deaths were of people who had been working on site for less than one week, which makes it much worse. It also emphasises the critical need for training at an early stage.

The seven-point plan proposed by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is a march back to the over-regulated 1960s and apparently proposes controls and burdens on businesses. Surely that is not the way forward. We need higher standards, but we will not achieve them by imposing burdens that have not been properly thought through or considered. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman about higher fines. It is easy to be simplistic and consider only the fine for a criminal offence. Any firm that is negligent is liable to massive damages in the civil court. I could reel off a number of cases in which firms have had to pay damages well in excess of £250,000 when someone has suffered death or serious injury, and that must not be overlooked. I also agree with the hon. Member for Oldham, West about the responsibility of a main contractor. That must also be considered extremely carefully.

I shall confine my remarks to the construction industry training board which is based in my constituency, as the Under-Secretary of State knows because he has been there. It is a centre of excellence and has a profound effect on my constituency. It is located not in a town but in a rural area and employs about 500 people. At least 10 villages are largely dependent on the CITB for their entire economy. Its impact locally is quite enormous, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is well aware. Since the centre was opened, 95,000 adults have been trained. It trains 5,000 people a year on 50 different courses. This year the CITB is responsible for 35,000 YTS places.

Paragraph 4.24 of the White Paper on training criticised the failure of industrial training boards to make a

significant impact on training generally, but that does not apply to the CITB, given its record in training over the years, its standards of excellence and the emphasis it places on safety right down the line. I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State mentioned today's initiative. "A Site More Safe" which is being launched by the CITB in conjunction with the Open College and Channel 4 and is aimed at those on the sites who are responsible for site safety—the foremen and the managers. That is why it is an important initiative. I shall not elaborate further, but the CITB is constantly producing more initiatives to improve safety standards. It is aware of the need to reduce the number of deaths and injuries. It is rising to that challenge through its training infrastructure.

The White Paper contains an intention to move the ITBs to a non-statutory training organisation basis. However, the construction industry differs from all other industries. It is unique. A vast number of businesses operate within it. Its work is largely cyclical and is often dominated by large projects such as the docklands and the Channel tunnel. The work force is highly mobile. As the hon. Member for Walton pointed out, the work shop is the site itself and that is why the industry cannot be considered in a ordinary way. Training must take place on site and if the work force is constantly moving on in different directions and different employers are poaching skilled workers and constantly looking for new staff for different sites the usual rules cannot apply to the construction industry.

If every employer contributes to a scheme and pays a levy the industry will be happy as it is at the moment. However, if only some employers contribute voluntarily, inevitably there will be a great deal of poaching. If some firms train staff and workers and pay the levy, when times become difficult they may not continue to do so. The arguments in favour of a statutory levy are extremely strong. If training moves on to an entirely voluntary basis, as my right hon. Friend the Minister said, when things are going well firms will continue to pay that levy. Certainly in a time of plenty and an economic boom which we are experiencing at the moment, firms would continue to pay, but if there were a downturn or another recession—and, as I said; the construction industry is cyclical by definition —I am convinced that firms will opt out of paying that levy and the entire infrastructure of the CITB would be under pressure and that would be high-risk tactics.

I accept that the CITB must make certain changes. It must do something about its deficit of £94 million. It proposes to reduce that deficit over five years to £25 million by charging the industry more. At present the industry pays nothing at all for the 35,000 YTS trainees. I believe that it will be fair for there to be some charge. There are other ways in which the CITB can raise money commercially. It will do that, and, furthermore, it will make it very clear to the Government, if it has not already done so, that it is quite prepared to take a smaller, reduced levy over a phased period. It can live with that, but an organisation that turns over £160 million and has such a training structure obviously cannot make changes too quickly. I would be the first person to say to the CITB that its whole bureaucracy is outdated and outmoded. It has a board of 30 people which meets three or four times a year and that structure is hardly conducive to good, streamlined, effective management. So I am pressing for structural changes to be made. However, I believe that the CITB can produce proposals that will satisfy the Minister and will be in keeping and in tune with the White Paper.

I must say to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State who is to reply to the debate that if the CITB has to cut its operations in west Norfolk the effect on local employment will be immediate and extremely serious. If we were talking about King's Lynn or Norwich the surplus employment could be taken up, but in rural villages where there are very few other jobs there is very little scope for alternative employment, especially when employment in agriculture is contracting. Obviously that is of tremendous importance to my constituency, particularly when the CITB has recently moved its headquarters to Norfolk. It was a major vote of confidence in a rural area and a rural constituency for a major organisation to move its headquarters into west Norfolk and employ 500 people. If the CITB has to cut back because the statutory levy is removed or confined to labour-only sub-contractors, inevitably there will be cuts in what the organisation offers at Bircham Newton and surely that would mean major cuts in safety standards.

If the Minister is serious about trying to reduce the figure of deaths and injuries which is far too high—there were 3,624 major injuries last year—there must be training at an early stage and those 5,000 adults a year must go through the CITB. Those adults do not all work on site. Many will be operating sophisticated plant. Many of them will be operating cranes, for example. Many will be scaffolders and steeplejacks. Those are the sorts of people who must have high-cost, highly sophisticated training, and if they do not get it at the CITB, or at Bircham Newton, it is unlikely that the firms will pay for it. In that case, this catalogue of statistics will get worse, not better.

I say to the Minister of State and to the Under-Secretary that the initiatives that the Government are coming up with are excellent. What they are doing to try to boost the Health and Safety Executive is to be applauded, but I urge them to look very carefully before making any major changes in the statutory levy. That could mean only one thing: perhaps not immediately, but over a period of years, the industry would pay less for training, and in due course a centre of excellence in my constituency would decline. That would have a devastating effect on safety and on the people about whom we care most—those working in the industry. We want to get the casualty figures down, and the only way of doing so is by continuing with the CITB. I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to do that. I hope that he will take my suggestion on board.

8.41 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I will not follow the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) into a consideration of the merits and demerits of the construction industry training board, whose ability to deliver its service to a constituency as remote as mine is somewhat incidental. However, I cannot help observing in passing that the hon. Member said that if the board were to play a lesser part, private employers would be likely to spend money on training. That does not seem a very great vote of confidence in the Government's proposals to put a greater burden of responsibility for training on the private sector.

[Mr. James Wallace]

As to the issue that is actually before the House in this debate, I do not think that there is any dispute about the fact that there is a serious problem and that this is a matter of considerable concern. That, I think, is common ground in all parts of the House. The fact that early-day motion 241 in the name of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has attracted so many signatures is indicative of the level of concern that this issue has raised. Quite honestly, I do not think that it matters whether the deaths have occurred under a Labour Administration or a Tory Administration. They are deaths, the number is far too high, and it is in the interests of every hon. Member to find ways of reducing it.

It is not entirely clear to me whether the figures that have been mentioned include deaths and injuries resulting from contact with dangerous substances and noise. I noted that last month Mr. John Cullen, the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, indicated that far more workers on construction sites are injured or killed as a result of contact with such substances or noise than as a result of accidents. The hon. Member for Walton raised that question. Clearly it is an important issue, and we shall be interested to know how the Government are responding to the claim.

In the debate in this House on 2 December 1987—the last time, I think, that the issue of health and safety was considered at length here—the Secretary of State said that "our health and safety arrangements are fitted to cope with the needs of a modern society and a changing and expanding economy."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1987; Vol. 123, c. 1004.]

In all honesty, I do not think that those comments match the situation. Since that time it has been clear that health and safety arrangements are not coping. Reference has already been made to the report "Blackspot Construction". I take encouragement from the fact that I do not think that any such great claims were made by the Minister of State when he spoke earlier today. I think that there is recognition of the fact that much more needs to be done.

As to the causes of accidents, including fatal accidents, it is all too simple to lay all of them at the door of some buccaneering builders, although I cannot deny that a good number of such builders exist, and no doubt they are responsible for many of the accidents that take place. Nor do I believe that the accidents can be laid at the door of some system of work—that it is all the result of people pursuing the profit motive. Inevitably, human nature comes into it. During my few years of practice at the Scottish Bar I acted on both sides of the argument—for employers and for employees. An amazing number of cases were put down purely to human nature. Employers can provide helmets, but the helmets are not always worn. Nor are safety harnesses always worn. That has nothing to do with failure to provide safety equipment; it is just that, for one reason or another, people think that they can do without it, and in some cases it is a question of sheer forgetfulness. Nevertheless, what is quite clear, as was indicated in the report "Blackspot Construction", is that 70 per cent. of accidents could be prevented by positive management action. Much could be done to increase awareness of safety. Awareness, I think, is the key, and lack of awareness is attributable to both employers and employees.

The report on the blitz campaign to which reference has been made showed that one third of all managers had insufficient knowledge of basic health and safety. That is a staggering figure. The report also showed that in 14 per cent. of the cases investigated no one was in charge of the work. Quite clearly, if management is unaware of important safety matters, one cannot readily expect employees to have that knowledge. As has been said by the Minister of State, particular features of the construction industry make the problems more acute. Unlike a factory, where the same conditions tend to prevail over many weeks—indeed, years—construction sites change constantly. Indeed, we are talking about different sites, as well as changing sites. A person may be on a site for only a few days, or even just a few hours. I talked earlier today to representatives of the Scottish building trade. They said to me—I regret that I do not have figures to back this up—that in the case of a long-term project such as the Torness power station construction it appeared that over a period of 10 years the level of accidents fell due to familiarity with the site. That is not always the case when building contractors move quickly from site to site.

Mr. John Ward (Poole): I agree very much with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Certainly I agree with what he says about big permanent or semi-permanent sites being much easier both to administer and to inspect. Does he recognise, however, that a great deal of the construction industry is based on very small sites with one, two or three men, and that in many cases those men are dealing with minor drainage projects, and so on? Very often that is where the greatest danger lies, and it is difficult to blame the employer alone for accidents.

Mr. Wallace: To some extent the hon. Member is making the point that I was about to make—that there is a whole series of small sites and that people may be on them for only a matter of hours. However, surely the underlying point must be taken together with the rapidly changing work force and lump labour—the fact that the person on whom one relied yesterday is not necessarily here today. That emphasises the need for a keener awareness of safety and for greater attention to safety matters. The fact that a site is small and that workers may be on it for only a few hours in no way absolves those responsible for safety factors.

The response that we have had from the Government is not adequate. The blitz campaign underlines the seriousness of the problem, but I do not believe that the increase in the budget of the Health and Safety Executive and the number of new inspectors go nearly far enough. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) illustrated the shortage of inspectors by referring to the number of sites that each inspector in London has to cover. It is my understanding that in the west of Scotland, including the great Strathclyde conurbation and the whole of the south west of Scotland, there are about five health and safety inspectors. It was graphically put to me that a health and safety inspector going to investigate a construction site in Dumfries would probably have to pass many hundreds of sites on his way there and that if he stopped to check each one he would probably never get to Dumfries.

The volume of work is immense and the necessary resources should be provided. By all means let us acknowledge what has been done, but it is clear from this

debate that far more needs to be done. We have heard the Government's response in relation to the compulsory wearing of safety helmets, and I do not dissent from that proposal at all. Indeed, I look foward to an indication from the Minister as to when it might be expected. There is good precedent for tomorrow not being early enough. I welcome the fact that more guidance material is to be made available to small firms. However, if the fundamental problem of increasing awareness is to be tackled, it is not just a question of highlighting faults, as the blitz campaign did. The Health and Safety Executive must do more by way of advising safety practices and encouraging good practices. I also agree that it is important to bring home to senior management the impact of fines. We should consider personal prosecutions rather than corporate ones. That was mentioned by the chief inspector of factories, Mr. Tony Linehan, in an article in the *Financial Times* of Friday 13 January:

"The Health and Safety Executive plans to start prosecuting directors of construction companies running building sites where there are serious accidents . . . he said the time had come to move beyond prosecuting companies and to explore action against individual directors responsible for safety."

The Minister also mentioned the recent prosecution of a site agent and a senior foreman. No doubt they are now well aware of the serious lessons to be drawn from failing to enforce adequate safety standards. Until that awareness is felt at the highest level, no real action will be taken to ensure that all sectors of the construction industry recognise the need to improve safety practices.

In a recent White Paper on road traffic law, the Government rightly suggested that insurance policies which protect the drink-driver offender from the consequences of disqualification are undesirable. To that end they have reached agreement with the Association of British Insurers to phase out such policies. If the fines imposed in the construction industry are to be effective, similar consideration should be given to phasing out insurance cover against such fines. I accept, as the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West has suggested, that civil damages may be sought, but invariably such matters are covered by insurance.

More attention must be given to smaller sites. We need more inspectors. We must also stress the importance of safety in training. Safety groups should be established under the auspices of an employers federation. It may be that a small company is unable to employ a safety officer or is not fully acquainted with the vast number of existing regulations. If a number of smaller companies joined together they could employ a safety officer whose remit would be to brief his various employers on safety requirements.

This debate is worthwhile because it highlights the importance of the issue. There is no room for complacency. I am sure that we shall return to this matter in the future and I hope that, by then, some of the positive and constructive ideas that have been mentioned tonight will have been implemented. I also hope that we shall have seen a downward trend in the current unacceptable level of fatal accidents and serious injuries.

8.52 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): As I am usually tail-end Charlie in debates, I assure hon. Members that I shall curtail my remarks tonight as I know that others want to speak.

I welcome this debate because I start from the premise —I assume that it is shared by all other hon. Members tonight—that the protection of the work force is the highest priority of any company. There is no question about that. I am sad, however, that, so far, this debate has not made clear that that responsibility is ably discharged by many construction companies, although there is no doubt that the construction industry faces problems. However, over-simplification will not help to solve them.

I am especially struck by the fact that no Opposition Member has been able to explain why it is that other sectors of British industry, which are equally beset by commercial pressures and all the other pressures outlined tonight, have better records on health and safety than the construction industry. One is led to conclude that the reasons for the above-average number of fatalities and injuries in the construction industry are therefore more complex than commercial pressures.

As I read the Opposition motion, it appears that they believe that the answer lies in more regulations, but that will not solve the problems. I do not believe that the mailed fist approach would help because the problems are much more deep seated than has been so far outlined.

I am also sad that the debate has not highlighted that health and safety are not just the responsibility of the Government. The motion charges the Government with this, that and any other responsibility but, although the Government have a role to play, such an approach ignores the role of companies, trade unions and employees. Alas, individual employees within the construction industry are just as guilty of lack of responsibility as some of the companies. There are good companies and bad ones, but I believe that we have more good ones than bad ones. Unfortunately, there are good and bad sectors of industry and the construction sector gives cause for great concern. It is important to stress, however, that it has been a matter of concern for many years and that that concern has spanned a number of Governments.

Health and safety should not be a political football, but the debate is in danger of making it such. Health and safety should be completely non-partisan and if one accepts that principle it leads in a more constructive direction than that proposed in the motion. Although the reasons behind the motion are of the highest integrity, the motion itself is disappointing and narrow. It over-simplifies the issue and as soon as one does that one unfortunately reaches the wrong conclusions.

We are all well aware that the Health and Safety Executive provides inspection, enforcement and advisory services. In the main, those advisory services are given free. Therefore, there is no excuse for any company to plead ignorance. In the past I have visited many companies and too many companies within the construction industry tended to plead ignorance.

We have heard a great deal about the strength of the Health and Safety Executive. I understand that there are now 99 inspectors. That level was not dictated by the Government; rather, the HSE established that that represented the right manning level. I accept that the inspectorate might be one short, but it is manned at roughly the right level. The HSE's funding for 1989-90 will be met in full and its budget will increase within the next three years. All that is in sharp contradistinction to the message I got from the Opposition Benches. I got the impression of depleted ranks within the HSE, a lack of money and all the rest of it. That is simply not true.

[Mr. James Cran]

I have the impression that, although a number of hon. Members have referred to the need for blitzes—indeed, the word appears in the Government amendment—it is considered by some to be an irrelevance. It is far from that. The blitz that took place between April 1987 and September 1988 resulted in about 8,300 construction sites being visited which highlighted many problems and resulted in action. Therefore, we need more site visits rather than less.

There is an even more powerful weapon to solve the problem that we are discussing. Sending directors to gaol and so on may be part of the solution, although I do not think that it would work. However, the threat of the closure of unsafe sites is a more important sanction because it hits a man—or in this case a company—where it hurts, which is in the pocket. Knowing the industrial community well, I am sure that such a sanction has a strong effect. Will the Minister say how many sites have been closed and whether the Government have been considering the use of this weapon in a more aggressive way?

We must accept that, even if the number of inspections was doubled, the enforcing authority could not have inspectors everywhere at the same time. That leads me to conclude that the amendment is right. Companies have by far the bigger role to play simply because inspectors cannot be everywhere.

The problem in this industry is attitudinal. There is a high labour turnover with small sub-contracting companies. That is the classic ingredient for extreme difficulties such as those we are debating. Bearing that in mind, and curtailing many of the remarks that I would have made had the debate been longer, I will confine myself to a few suggestions.

Companies have a definite responsibility. The problem lies in the large number of small sub-contractors in the industry. If they will not tackle the problem, it must be tackled by the main contractors. In other areas, such as manufacturing, large companies use their purchasing power with those from whom they purchase to get the right quality.

It does not seem a great departure for contractors in the construction industry to get their sub-contractors together and tell them the facts of life with regard to health and safety. The essential fact—it should go ringing from the House—is that the figures of fatalities are unacceptable.

In addition, I hope that the Health and Safety Executive will continue to intensify its activities. Will the Minister give us an assurance that that will happen, because, along with the resultant enforcement actions, it is of prime importance? The other piece of the jigsaw is what the Government can do to help. I support what the Minister of State said about more regulations being needed to cover such issues as the compulsory wearing of hard hats on construction sites. That is not an irrelevancy; it can make a big contribution to reducing the fatality figures.

I applaud the Government for what they are doing and I shall be watching their efforts to ensure that they take whatever steps are possible to solve the problem. None of us wants to return to this issue in a year or two and have to speak again about this sorry state of affairs in the industry.

9.4 pm

Dr. John Gilbert (Dudley, East): I must at the outset declare an interest as a non-executive director of a civil engineering company. I support the motion and particularly the call on

"the Government to increase inspection, improve site management and enforce tougher penalties".

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) on his campaign over many years to get this matter brought before the House. He knows far more about the industry than I shall ever know. He made a fair speech, acknowledging that responsibility for accidents lay in different places.

Some incidents are clearly management responsibilities, some are due to workers ignoring management instructions, and some are plainly accidents about which nothing can be done. For example, the provision of adequate safety clothing, and the enforcement of its wearing, the provision of railings where appropriate and the shoring up of excavations are clearly management responsibilities. But there is no way to legislate to ensure that a man handles a piece of mechanical equipment correctly. He may do it negligently or in circumstances which result in an accident.

The use that may be made of site statistics can be misleading because, as has been pointed out, some sites exist for only a day or so, or even a few hours. It would be misleading to include those in the total statistics. But that does not alter the fact that it would be good to have up to double the number of inspectors and site visits, and every responsible firm would agree with that.

No sensible firm wants a prohibition notice or prosecution. My company makes safety a formal item on the agenda for every board meeting and at every meeting we discuss a report on safety matters. In addition—at my suggestion, which my colleagues cheerfully accepted—the safety officer must make a report in person to the board at least once a year. There is great awareness that safety is, above all, a board responsibility.

The Government should consider making the appointment of a safety officer a statutory responsibility of every company in the industry, rather in the way that the appointment of a company secretary is a statutory responsibility of a company. I disagree with the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that some firms might be too small to employ a safety officer. At least one member of the management of every company, however small, should have responsibility for safety. Even if it is a small firm, he can do that along with his other duties. The fact that a firm is small should not be a let-out from having a safety officer.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House accept that the situation remains unsatisfactory, and I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) say that there should be more site visits. I did not understand how he thought that could be achieved without many more inspectors being appointed. We want more such visits and more prohibitions where necessary, but, above all, we want those visits to take place as a deterrent so that prohibitions and prosecutions are not necessary.

There will be no permanent solution to the problem, because just as there will always be traffic accidents there will always be construction accidents. There could be far fewer, and it is up to us to reduce them. The responsibility lies squarely with the Government who must play their

part. They are not doing that and their complacent amendment shows no sign of their accepting responsibility for these matters.

9.10 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): The subject of the debate is of great concern to all hon. Members. I shall avoid repeating what has been said with eloquence by other hon. Members. There are two ways of looking at the problem and they illustrate the difference between the Government and the Opposition. First, there is the idealistic approach. It is quite right in its way and says that every death is a tragedy, that it is preventable and should be prevented. Who among us could possibly argue with that view?

There is another view which says that it is remarkable that so few construction workers are killed every year, given the boom in construction all over the country and human nature. Little has been said about human nature, but it is the fundamental problem at the heart of the matters that we are discussing. We talk about short cuts, carelessness and over-confidence and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) said, we often talk about inexperience. We point to those things as being the causes of accidents in the construction industry.

Another difference between the two main parties in the House is that the Government look to the Health and Safety Executive and the Health and Safety Commission for guidance. The Health and Safety Executive said that by 1990 we would need 100 inspectors in the construction industry. A year before that time we have 99 inspectors in post. The Opposition propose to tell the Health and Safety Executive what to do. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said that we could have 200 inspectors now, but I suspect that if he had his way we would have many more. I say to him and to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who is not in the Chamber, that it is not a bad idea to take note of the advice and guidance of the experts that we employ. The man in Whitehall does not always know best.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West spoke about blacklisting. That is a typical red herring that comes up in almost every debate on employment. I should like to quote a real expert, the director general of the Health and Safety Executive, Mr. Rimington. When he addressed the Select Committee on Employment at the end of last year he said:

"We are in fact increasing the number of inspectors in construction. Perhaps I should explain, I think it is generally known, that we did make representations to the Secretary of State, the Commission did, last year, with the result that more money was made available to us. We are building up the Factory Inspectorate from what is certainly too low a figure. Our main priorities over the next year will be to increase the amount of inspection on construction sites, and to increase the amount of inspection of small firms and contracting firms generally. As you probably know, there has been quite a mushroom growth of those. Many of them, while not wishing, I think, to defy safety provisions, prove to be unaware of some of the hazards with which they are confronted."

In the same exchange Mr. Rimington said:

"Certainly, as regards the construction industry generally, there has been an enormous amount of enforcement activity over the past two or three years. The number of enforcement actions that the Factory Inspectorate has taken on construction sites have virtually trebled over the past two years."

That is the reasoned and measured voice of the expert, and I prefer it to the hysterical ravings of the hon. Member for Oldham, West. He blamed Thatcherism and said that the amazing growth in activity in the construction industry caused the problem at the root of our debate. There has been massive growth not only in activity but also in employment, yet the hon. Gentleman berates the level of unemployment. He cannot have it both ways.

Nothing that the Government could do could be as effective as discipline and self discipline on site. Safety education, protective clothing, prohibition orders and fines are important. Perhaps when the Minister replies to the debate he will comment on the point that a maximum fine of £2,000 in a magistrates court is too low. It might with advantage be significantly increased; and the power to bring actions in a higher court should also be examined.

At the end of the day, safety comes down to one man and one job and the right and wrong way to carry it out. There is no point in saying that it is the Government's fault. It is the fault of any man who allows his life to be placed in jeopardy. We must not get into the cosy attitude of blaming it on Government. We are all individually responsible when we put ourselves at risk, whether in construction, on the roads, in the home or anywhere else. The individual's responsibility must be paramount.

9.16 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): I echo the hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) in paying tribute to the Health and Safety Commission and complimenting it on the documents that it has supplied. The commission says that between 1981 and 1985 there were 739 deaths in the construction industry. It said that nearly all of them could have been prevented and that in 70 per cent. of the cases positive action by management could have saved lives. It clearly pins the responsibility on management. It talks about the need to plan and develop safe systems of work before the job starts. The commission talks about roof work and says:

"In the vast majority of fatal accidents on roofs, management . . . did not exercise sufficient control to ensure that relatively simple precautions were taken."

On demolition the commission said that 67 out of 95 accidents causing death were caused by management allowing unsafe systems of work.

The Labour party has instigated this debate because there is a rising trend in accidents. Between 1981 and 1985 major injuries increased by 30 per cent. and in a 10-year period there were 1,500 deaths in the construction industry. In that same decade 500,000 injuries were sufficiently bad to keep people off work for three days. That is much worse than what happened at King's Cross or in the Clapham rail disaster. The number of deaths is much greater than the 495 killings by the IRA. During that same decade three times as many people were killed on construction sites.

In the Falklands conflict 254 British service men were killed, but there have been many more deaths in construction. We must speak out loudly and clearly and say that this is intolerable. Death and injury occur too easily and too often in the construction industry, which is one of the most dangerous industries in Britain. The worrying thing is that the post-war improvement in the figures has been halted, the trend has been reversed and the toll of death and crippling injury is increasing. That is an intolerable scandal and the House must decide to do something about it.

Why are the figures getting worse? Why is there a disaster area? Perhaps it is partly because of the changing

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

face of the industry. Many of today's larger companies have fewer directly employed workers than they used to have. There has been a huge increase in self-employment, what is known as the lump, and in small contractors. The Health and Safety Executive said that these small firms are constantly competing for work and often cut costs to the bone and that safety is usually one of the first casualties —if it is ever considered at all—so that, in the conflict between profits and health and safety, health and safety come last.

More than one third of all employees are now in companies with seven or fewer people, whereas in 1975 it was only one in seven. So we have myriad tiny sub-contracting firms going in and out of business. More than half the deaths occurred on sites with fewer than 10 people. Half the victims had been working for only a week or less on the site where they were killed. Those in charge of the work were considered to be wholly or partly to blame for two thirds of the deaths and to be solely responsible in over half those cases.

If we are to have a campaign that will succeed, most of these small firms will have to be brought into it. My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) knows that in the east end of London there is a great growth of construction industry at the moment. The east end is like a forest of cranes. There is an increase in work and this means great pressure to take on inadequately trained, inexperienced labour; and unless something drastic is done there will be an increase in this tide of tragedy.

What is being done about it? We have had the so-called blitz. It started in April 1987 and it was found that by law if work is to last for six weeks the health and safety authorities have to be notified. Only one third of the employers did so. That is another way of saying that two thirds broke the law. Nearly one third of the sites were controlled by agents or supervisors whose knowledge of health and safety legislation was poor or very poor. On 14 per cent. of the sites management was non-existent. Things were so bad and dangerous that on one in four sites work was stopped.

Of course, some firms were good and some were excellent and that showed that they could compete in the market place and implement proper safety measures, which disproves the argument that proper safety makes firms uncompetitive.

The other thing that was found through the blitz was that there were very few prosecutions. Why was that? The Health and Safety Executive explained that it was because of the time and effort necessary to prosecute and the fact that it did not have the necessary staff.

We must ask ourselves what we are to do about this situation. We have to have enforcement of the existing law. If there are no prosecutions, if firms know that they can break the law and cause death and injury and there will be no prosecutions, or they will just have their wrists smacked, nothing will happen. If they are prosecuted in the magistrates court, where the maximum fine is £2,000, we shall not get anywhere. We need proper enforcement. There are not enough inspectors or resources, and the Government are to blame. That is why I intervened in the Minister's speech.

The hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs), who is a valuable member of the Employment Committee, referred to the health and safety evidence given to the Committee. I have here the annual report of the Health and Safety Executive 1986-87, which says:

"During the six year period April 1980/86, the resources available to the Executive declined in real terms and the number of our inspectors by 213".

So under this Government real resources to the Health and Safety Executive have declined and the number of inspectors has been cut. There is also a reference in the report to a suspension of recruitment between 1980 and 1984. For four years there was a complete suspension of recruitment to the inspectorate. The Government ought to apologise for that error and that cutting of the inspectorate.

The same report says that the pressure on resources throughout the year was a matter of anxiety to the executive and it could not do its job. It explained that in the following year, 1987-88, the rates of pay for inspectors were increased, but the amount of money available to the Health and Safety Executive did not go up. Therefore, again the number of inspectors had to be cut.

The truth is—and I will give way immediately if the Minister can say that I am wrong—that the numbers of agriculture inspectors, factory inspectors and inspectors of mines and quarries are now lower than in 1986 and in 1977, 12 years ago. That is where the Government are to blame for the lack of enforcement.

They say that there are 99 inspectors in the construction industry. That is totally inadequate. There are 180,000 firms in the construction industry.

Time is very short and that is why I have truncated my remarks to let some of my colleagues speak, but I want to suggest a number of things that I think should be done.

First, there must be an increase in penalties. We have to get prosecutions brought in the Crown court and not in the magistrates court. They have to go to the magistrates court first and it is for the Health and Safety Executive to ask that they be moved up to the Crown court. When men or women leave home to go to work their families expect them to come home in the evening, and if employers are so grossly negligent that they cause the death of a worker the sentence should be imprisonment. I believe that until we get some sentences of imprisonment neither employers nor anybody else on the site will take these matters seriously.

The second step is to take up the idea of UCATT, which has asked for what it calls super-safety reps, rather similar to full-time shop stewards who would be full-time safety representatives.

Thirdly, the super-safety reps should have the right to stop a job when there is danger to life. If they had that power it would really mean something. Some people may think that that is going too far, but I remind the House that in the Norwegian sector of the North sea the Norwegian trade union safety representives have that right, although they hardly ever use it because the management takes them seriously and there is proper safety treatment. There should be a right to stop the job where necessary to protect life.

Lastly, because we are dealing with an emergency and need extra safety representatives and inspectors quickly, the Government should take up the visionary offer by the general secretary of UCATT to make available his 120 union officials to act as inspectors. These are people with a lifetime of experience of the industry who know what

they are talking about. They would work under the supervision of the Health and Safety Executive. That would be a way of doubling the inspectorate immediately to get some action on something which all hon. Members must regard as a national emergency.

9.28 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I agree with hon. Members on both sides of the House that safety in the workplace is too important to be dealt with on the basis of ideological prejudice. Indeed, anyone who recognises the nature of the building industry will know how deep-seated and difficult some of the problems are. It is a diffuse industry which works in many different locations. As a result, it is small wonder that the Health and Safety Executive found in its survey that 65 per cent. of firms did not identify work that was likely to go on for more than six weeks.

It is inherently a risky industry. Risk is compounded by latitude in the industry, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) mentioned. It was significant that the report of the Health and Safety Executive, referring to the introduction of helmets to improve safety, said:

"Reactions range from unthinking abuse to total apathy, typifying an all too common lack of concern for safety measures."

Therefore, health and safety problems in the industry remain deep-seated. It is wrong to lash out at various so-called contributory factors, such as the lump system or what the motion calls "relentless commercial pressures". That is simplistic.

The evidence provided by the Health and Safety Executive does not support the theory that the irresponsible behaviour and sloppiness that lead to accidents are necessarily increased at times of commercial upsurge. For instance, as a proportion of the numbers in the industry there was little difference in the number of fatalities in 1981, when the industry was depressed, and 1986-87, when it was booming. The survey on the blitz between April 1987 and September 1988 on the 2,000 prohibitions issued by the Health and Safety Executive shows that, while prohibitions were imposed on 51 out of 55 sites in Glasgow, which was booming at that time, in Southampton, where market conditions were equally booming, there were only five prohibitions out of 134 sites.

Most of all, the Labour party motion fails to recognise, as Her Majesty's chief inspector of safety recognises, that it is precisely those companies with the most strict safety rules and the most strict system of monitoring and training their work forces on safety that are the most successful and profitable. As the chief inspector said:

"A well-planned contract which identifies safety requirements will be more efficiently run, more productive and therefore more profitable."

The Government are right to try to set down an effective framework within which, through voluntary co-operation, employers, employees and regulators within the industry can make an improvement in safety.

That is not to say that safety is not a matter of concern. There has been reference in the debate to an article in the *Financial Times* which said that only 49 per cent. of sites with more than 50 employees visited by the Health and Safety Executive had prohibition notices; that the overall standards of health and safety were poor; and that only one third of managers on sites had an adequate grasp of safety procedures. It is worrying that prosecutions have not led to a greater change in attitudes in the industry.

While I welcome the approach by the Government to increase safety supervision in smaller companies, to improve site notification procedure and to allow for better management and co-ordination on multi-contractor sites, I think that there is a strong case for stricter penalties for people who break the law. Equally, there is a strong case for the promotion of model contracts which could be put forward by the Building Employers Confederation, the National House-Building Council and others. Those contracts should show exactly what good safety procedures involve.

In the long run, attitudes will be improved only through training. It was significant that Brian Hewitt, the National House-Building Council president, welcomed the Government review of training recently when he said that it

"provides the house-building industry with the first opportunity for over 20 years to make a meaningful impact on training policy."

There will be 60,000 entrants a year into the building industry over the next few years and a massive need for retraining. Now that the National Council for Vocational Qualifications has recognised the CITB as a lead industrial body, it is important that it uses competence procedures for qualifications in a modular form, if necessary, including health and safety aspects so as to improve significantly the amount of training that is done within the industry on health and safety.

It is a waste of time having well-trained operatives within an industry unless the public have confidence in the way that industry is policed. Although statutory regulations for every type of building work contractor would be unrealistic and undesirable, there is a strong case for statutory self-regulation of the industry, which could take place either through the National House-Building Council or the Building Employers Confederation for companies, depending on the kind of work that they are doing, its complexity and its scope.

A house builder, if he has satisfied criteria of confidence and experience and has provided adequate insurance indemnity and evidence that he has understood safety procedures, would be made responsible on the site on which he worked, irrespective of whether he was sub-contracting, employing lump labour or directly employing labour, for safety on that site. It is curious that, while there is a seven-year training period for architects and a four-year training period for house planners, there is no specific and necessary training period for house builders. If we did what I propose, the reputation of the industry would be increased, the consumers' confidence would be restored, and the safety of employees in the industry would be immeasurably improved.

9.35 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Piper Alpha, King's Cross and Zeebrugge were all dreadful disasters involving huge loss of life and terrible injuries. Shock and horror were rammed into the lives of the families affected. Every year there is a disaster of similar magnitude in the construction industry, but the disaster is diffused. It is not concentrated but hidden, and it is not exposed in the media in the same way as the terrible disasters to which I have already referred.

My colleagues have referred to "Blackspot Construction" produced by the Health and Safety Executive in June 1988. That document recorded that 739

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

people were killed in construction accidents between 1981 and 1985—an average of 147 deaths per year. That is twice the rate for agriculture and five times the rate for manufacturing industry. Since 1985, it has climbed to 160 deaths per year. A construction worker is killed or seriously injured on site every hour of every working day and a less serious injury occurs once every couple of minutes. Deaths caused by long-term diseases and injuries kill 4,000 people per year. That is carnage—the word used by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—and carnage on a horrific scale. It is a battlefield on which building workers are the cannon fodder for the employers' profit system.

Not all the people on a building site face the same risks. The chances of a site manager or agent dying of lung cancer before reaching retirement age are half that for the general population. By contrast, according to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys decennial occupational mortality supplement 1979-80 and 1982-83, a plasterer runs three times the risk of disease as his boss. The risk of disease extends to families living in buildings under construction, repair or renovation, as recent evidence from Germany has shown from the use of timber treatment solutions containing pentachlorophenol and lindane. Fifty thousand people in this country belong to the Association of Victims of Wood Preservatives and are preparing to sue United Kingdom companies such as Rentokil and Cuprinol which distribute products which can allegedly cause leukemia, cancer and blood disorders including aplastic anaemia.

My time on the shop floor during the 1970s was littered with anecdotal stories of how we hardly ever contributed to retirement do's for chippies or welders as they never lived long enough to retire because they worked with similarly dangerous substances. The common link between Piper Alpha, King's Cross, Zeebrugge and the construction accidents and illnesses which we have discussed this evening is that they are all preventable. All the deaths are the result of callous disregard by employers for workers' safety. It does not matter whether the employers be Occidental, British Rail, Townsend Thoresen, John Laing, Tarmac, Rentokil or Cuprinol.

Whether those deaths are preventable is not, in a sense, in question tonight. The Opposition have stated that they are, as has the HSE in its five-yearly report which stated:

"Ninety per cent. of construction fatalities could have been prevented."

Even the Prime Minister's amendment acknowledges that. Clearly the Government have been on the defensive tonight. The HSE continued:

"In 70 per cent. of cases, positive action by management could have saved lives."

Why is that action not forthcoming? That question should be the crux of this debate. That is what I think and what I want to express in these two or three minutes after waiting many months to make a major contribution in this hallowed hall of the House of Commons. That question should be the crux of the debate in the few minutes that remain.

Action is not forthcoming because of the £12 billion worth of contracts in London and the south-east alone. Contractors have been told to complete contracts on time, regardless of how many corners they cut. The most infamous statement that I have heard in six years in this palace of varieties is "a man a mile" in relation to the building of the Channel tunnel. It is estimated that the Chunnel will lead to 20 deaths in 20 miles. That is the impact on the work carried out. Deaths are being built into the budget. That is an obscenity. There is no other word for it. It is obscene that the construction industry's profits should be put before the lives of those who create that wealth.

The Government and the Prime Minister's all pervading and perverse philosophy of "get rich quick and ignore the lives of the workers" underpins the philosophy of the employers. In the past 10 years, 1,500 people have died in construction accidents. According to the Health and Safety Executive, the number of fatal and major injuries has risen by 66 per cent. in the past seven years. In the two years 1986 and 1987, six of the top building firms in Britain—Beazer, Bovis, Laing, Tarmac, Wimpey and Trafalgar House—made £836 million profit. In the past three years, Laing, McAlpine, Balfour Beatty, Tarmac and Wimpey have all been found guilty of health and safety offences. The fines have been between £500 and £2,000. When one compares that with Jeffrey Archer's £500,000 and Elton John's £1 million—when one sets the reputations of those individuals against the lives of construction workers—how do the scales balance?

From January 1983 to March 1987, the average fine on 2,343 firms was £361—the same as the average fine for not paying the fare on London Transport. That is how much the lives of workers in the construction industry are considered. The Government take no serious account of that point, and their attitude is understandable when one notes that in 1987 Wimpey, Bovis, Tarmac, Trafalgar House and Costain each gave between £25,000 and £37,000 to the Tory party to keep it sweet. Amey Roadstone, Costain, Gleeson, McAlpine, Marples, Taylor Woodrow, Wimpey and Mowlem also all subscribe to the Economic League which blacklists any shop steward who sticks his head above the parapet and complains about unsafe working conditions.

The Labour Government gave us the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, but that is no more than a bit of paper unless it has teeth and stewards have the confidence to use it. The Health and Safety Executive is staffed by well-intentioned individuals, but it is inadequate. The Minister said earlier that this was a red herring, but the Government employ six times as many dole snoopers in London as factory inspectors. Last year, 4,133 sites known to inspectors in London had 12 inspectors to cover them. They could not get to each of them once a year if they tried, so although there were 36 deaths in London last year and 413 major injuries there were only 18 prosecutions and no employer was gaoled—so much for the law and order party!

The workers have had enough. A debate like this will not satisfy the thousands of workers who are sick to the back teeth of burying their mates after accidents. Comrades have spoken of it. Building workers, first in London and now in the midlands, have formed the construction safety campaign. They are asking for a lot of things—but the first and most important is that the number of deaths and injuries of construction workers in Britain should become a major political issue. Tonight we have made a start on that. There are a few more miles to go down that road. We shall have lobbies and meetings and, no doubt, some industrial action along the way as well. We shall do what we have started to do in Coventry,

where we are banning contractors when scaffolding and other inadequate working practices on building sites are creating risks for workers. We shall put that proposal to every Labour council.

Our experience and that of the Health and Safety Executive is that the Government do not allow the HSE the resources to operate properly. The debate may be a little irritant to those Tory Members who have turned up, but what of the wives and the bairns of those who have died in the past 10 years? There are about 1·5 million workers in the industry, and in the past 10 years 1,500 have been killed and 40,000 have died from bronchitis, cancer and other diseases caused by dust and unhealthy working conditions. The number injured runs into millions.

Our motion puts the blame where it lies. The chilling report of the Health and Safety Executive shows that 90 per cent. of fatalities in the construction industry are preventable—not "avoidable", as the Minister said. He should look in a dictionary and see the difference between the two. If employers—those with the money—really meant to save the lives of their workers, they could do so.

There is a solution to the problem. It lies in the motion, in the suggestion of the Health and Safety Executive, and in the work of the construction safety campaign. Employers do not care a damn about safety. They care only about profit. The only way that we shall stop their lust for profit and the killing of workers in the construction industry is when those employers no longer own and control it—when workers in the building industry and the working class generally own, control, plan and manage the construction industry. Then we shall build houses without the death of workers being the price that is paid.

9.45 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): It is a measure of the importance that we attach to the subject that not all right hon. and hon. Members who wished to speak in the debate have been able to participate.

There can be no doubt about the high level of accidents in the construction industry, and there can be no doubt about the need for effective action by all concerned to improve health and safety standards. The construction industry is one of the most dangerous in the country. The Health and Safety Executive's 1987-88 report shows that the number of employees who suffered fatal injuries in all industries totalled 340 and that no fewer than 100 of them were in construction, compared with 96 in all manufacturing industries. The figures in respect of the self-employed and non-employed are even more striking. The number for all industries is 525, of which 157 are accounted for by construction and 100 by manufacturing.

The figure of 157 deaths in construction for 1987-88 is the highest since 1981. I refer also to the figures for reported accidents per 100,000 employees, the latest of which were published in February with the *Employment Gazette* supplement, from which one can see that accident rates in construction are among the highest of all the industries included. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) made it clear that, along with all those accidents, there are deaths arising from occupational disease such as asbestosis and bronchitis. The chairman of the Health and Safety Commission, Dr. John Cullen, stated that more people die from contact with dangerous substances and from noise on construction sites than from injuries.

The Government have a responsibility, and the Minister made great play of the fact that recently there has been an increase in the number of factory inspectors dealing with the construction industry. However, that increase is against the background of a progressive decline in the number of Health and Safety Executive staff and of factory and agricultural inspectors. There has been a decline in qualified and experienced factory inspectors, and all the increases are accounted for by recent new recruits. It is arguable that the additional number of construction inspectors will be less capable of doing the job than would be the case were there a more balanced complement, with the more experienced and qualified inspectors who have left to take other jobs.

That decline in the executive, for which the Government have been responsible over 10 years, has occurred while the Government have piled additional responsibility upon responsibility on the commission and the executive. I refer to the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1984, responsibility for gas safety including domestic installations, the Road Traffic (Carriage of Dangerous Substances in Packages etc.) Regulations 1986, and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, which will shortly come into operation. All those are increased responsibilities and yet, at the same time, year in, year out, there has been a decline in the resources available to the Health and Safety Executive. We welcome the belated improvement, but it is totally inadequate—infinitesimal against what is needed to restore the position. We need a commitment from the Government to increase the amount available to the Health and Safety Executive by a substantial amount each year in order to begin to overcome the problems.

Against that background of a shortage of factory inspectors, it was probably right to have the much publicised blitz to which the hon. Members referred. However, when a blitz takes place, the people inspecting the sites are unable to do their normal jobs. Inspectors are reallocated to the work instead of carrying out the jobs they should be doing. As I am sure Ministers recognise, an important role of the inspectors is advisory and educational.

The Government have responsibilities for health and safety in our construction industry. We need a massive increase in the number of inspectors and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, there is a great need for longer sentences for offenders. Top managers should go to gaol if they are responsible for inadequate health and safety standards that lead to death and serious injury on construction sites.

Reference has been made to the excellent study, "Blackspot Construction", carried out by the Health and Safety Executive. That points out quite clearly time and again that responsibility for these injuries and deaths lies with the site management, and inadequate supervision and planning of the work places.

It should be made absolutely clear that responsibility lies in the work place with the workers themselves, in addition to the inspectorate. We deplore the fact that, year in, year out, the Government have enacted legislation to undermine and weaken the trade union movement, which has, and should play, a key role in health and safety in the workplace, particularly on construction sites. It is no use

[Mr. Gavin Strang]

the Government talking about the role of the workers and the trade unions and, at the same time, constantly introducing legislation to weaken and undermine them.

The Government have put private profit before public service and preferred tax cuts to public investment on improved services. The Government have undermined the trade union movement at every opportunity. We are not suggesting that the Government are indifferent to death and injury on building sites, but the Government have not given health and safety in the construction industry the priority that they deserve. That is why we shall be voting for the motion.

9.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): The inevitable constraints of time mean that I shall not be able to do justice to the powerful contributions made by a number of hon. Members. Without the two inevitable exceptions, the contributions made were extremely helpful, and of the sort that we expect to hear.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State called for a debate which went above party and which would bring about some positive suggestions for tackling a very real problem and give a clear message to the industry that it must do better. For the most part, that has been the case and I shall certainly look at *Hansard* to note the points that have been made, and reply to any specific points as necessary.

I shall comment shortly upon some of the points that have been made in the debate, but I first want to emphasise two points which are central to the issue of construction safety. First, far too many people are killed while working on sites—hon. Members from both sides of the House have rightly condemned that carnage. Secondly, it is wholly inexcusable because so many—90 per cent. of the deaths—are obviously preventable.

Yes, construction sites may be inherently dangerous, with large machines, heavy weights and heights, but time and again inspectors report that the true cause of an accident was ignorance, complacency or lack of thought about basic and simple precautions. It is utterly unacceptable that some of those engaged in the construction industry have so little regard for human life and the well-being of their fellow citizens.

However, there is another reason why this record is so appalling. It concerns an area where the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and the Opposition motion have chosen to try to make cheap political capital, and about which they are mistaken. They have charged the Government with some form of commercial interest in fostering poor safety conditions, but the message that we are trying to get across to industry is that there is every commercial reason to ensure that firms have the highest safety standards. Accidents not only cause pain and suffering but incur extremely high costs—£2 billion per annum—a high proportion of which fall on the construction industry. Young people will soon be in short supply, and the industry's image will do it no good whatever in a difficult recruitment market.

When inspectors visit sites they find that there is a direct correlation between firms with good safety standards and those that are successful. Those that have poor standards often go bust. Mistakenly, their managers think that by cutting corners they can make economies. Such short-sighted attitudes invariably backfire, and the same lackadaisical attitude to running their business leads to economic ruin. A good manager knows that he must ensure that his company performs well in all sectors and that it is counterproductive to cheat on safety.

In a powerful contribution, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said that safety is a question of "your health or their wealth." He could not be more wrong. There is nothing contradictory or inimical between profits and safety; the two must go hand in hand.

Mention was made of accident rates, and inevitably the hon. Member for Oldham, West interpreted them in a particular way. The hon. Gentleman seems to think that we do not understand the message. There were 157 fatalities last year and 3,600 major injuries—too many. Like it or not, the hon. Gentleman will have to face up to the fact that the prevention of accidents lies not with the Government but with those who work on sites and primarily, though not exclusively, with employers.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West has a way of presenting figures. I shall make a point from which I take no comfort—it is the sort of thing in which the hon. Gentleman wants to indulge—about the number of fatalities in the construction industry. There were 139 deaths in the boom period of 1986-87 and 157 in 1987-88. Those figures are well below the rates of the last sustained boom in construction. In 1974, there were 166 deaths and in 1975 there were 182. If I adopted the simplistic nonsense of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, I could say, "That is OK. We are doing better and deaths were higher under a Labour Government." I derive no comfort from that, but that is the way in which the hon. Gentleman tried to present the argument. It is not good enough to come to the House with pretensions of office when the best that one can do is to try to attribute accident figures to political opponents. Even by the standards of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, that will not work.

We understand that the Opposition take a dirigiste view of the courts, but the Government should not lecture courts on how to decide cases. It is the Government's job to ensure that penalties are available for courts to use. If magistrates decide that a case is serious enough to commit to the Crown court, that is where it goes. Companies do not take fines of £750,000 lightly. Such fines make a substantial deficit in a company's accounts. It is about time that people such as the hon. Member for Oldham, West, who pretend to take an interest in these matters, understood that.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State said that the construction industry's fatality record was quite appalling. The misery, desolation and grief that underlie the figures for many families is made more unbearably acute by the fact that many of the accidents were avoidable. When others rise to the occasion, the hon. Member for Oldham, West is more likely to sink to it. Surely this is an issue in which even he could have risen above his usual practice of using and abusing any issue for cheap political points. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) at least did his best to reflect that concern.

What we need to know from the Opposition tonight, as the debate reaches its conclusion, is which of their two spokesmen more accurately reflects Opposition views. Is it an attempt at common sense or cheap sensationalism; positive action or political posturing; heartfelt concern or

the usual Oldham claptrap? In a few moments' time we will know the answer to that, but even if students of Labour's past form are unlikely to be disappointed, we could all hope that, just this once, they might conceivably have got it wrong.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 212, Noes 265.

Division No. 154] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool.B G'n)*
Fiannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mrs. Llin Golding.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Emery, Sir Peter

Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, John *(Oxford W)*
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House, deploring the high accident rate on construction sites and noting that 90 per cent. of construction accidents are preventable, recognises that the prime responsibility for safety lies with employers and others on site; acknowledges the vigorous action which the Health and Safety Commission and Executive have taken through enforcement blitzes and publicity campaigns on construction safety; and welcomes the increased provision which the Government has made available to the Health and Safety Executive thereby enabling the Executive to increase the number of inspectors employed on construction work.

European Community (Weights and Measures)

10.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Corporate Affairs (Mr. Francis Maude): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4102/89 on units of measurement; and welcomes the proposals as providing adequate transitional periods to enable businesses and consumers to adapt and become used to the new measurements.

In 1965 the then Government announced their support to encourage the adoption of metric units as the primary system for weights and measures in the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are not remaining for this debate please leave quietly?

Mr. Maude: That was a decision taken for purely domestic reasons, in response to urging by the CBI and others; it had nothing to do then with possible membership of the European Community. In 1971 the then member states of the Community adopted a directive which established the sole use of the metric system throughout the Community. When the United Kingdom and Ireland acceded to the Community the Government accepted that eventually the metric system should be the only system to be used.

In consequence, a White Paper on metrication was published in 1972. It stated that all practicable progress towards the full use of the metric system should be made within the next few years, in the interests of economic prosperity. This led to the education system moving to the use of metric units in 1974. As a result, 11 million children since then have been taught only in the metric system.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I am interested to hear that the Government now take orders from the CBI. If the situation is as my hon. Friend says, I wonder whether he can tell us why abolition of the Metrication Board was one of the Government's first acts on being elected in 1979.

Mr. Maude: In the hubbub my hon. Friend may not have heard that I was referring to the Government in 1965 taking steps in response to urging by the CBI. I am now dealing with steps taken by the Government in 1972 and 1974. My hon. Friend will realise that different considerations may have applied then.

In the late 1970s, discussion began, under the last Government, on proposals for a new directive. The directive was eventually adopted in late 1979, having been modified by the present Government to allow the yard to continue to be used. In its final form, the directive continued to authorise the use of the remaining imperial units in the United Kingdom and Ireland until a date to be fixed by those member states. However, the directive provided that there should be a further directive, to be agreed not later than the end of the 1989, which would set a final date by which the United Kingdom and Ireland should end the use of imperial units. The proposals we are discussing are intended to meet that commitment. They have been brought forward as a result of a binding commitment entered into by the Government, with bipartisan support, in 1979.

Following the Single European Act, the directive falls to be decided under article 100A by qualified majority, and the United Kingdom and Ireland alone do not form a blocking minority.

Let us now consider the detail of the commission's proposals. The first proposal covers the mile, yard, foot and inch for road transport purposes, the pint for dispensing draught beer and cider, the pint for milk in returnable bottles, and the acre.

We and Ireland will be able to continue to authorise those units for these purposes for as long as we wish, without any need for a further EC decision. Therefore, the mile, the pint in the pub, the doorstep pint of milk and the acre will be preserved.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Did my hon. Friend say

"as long as we wish"

or will there be a termination date of 1999?

Mr. Maude: There is no termination date and it will be for the member states concerned to set a termination date if and when they wish.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The Minister said that the directive will be determined under article 100A. The Select Committee on European Legislation said in its report:

"It appears to the Committee, in the light of the Department's response to the second point"—

it was about article 100A—

"that there is no impediment to the Commission, if the present proposal is adopted by the Council, subsequently submitting a further proposal, under Article 100A, to fix the date for ending".

That means the use of this particular group of measures could be ended under article 100A.

Mr. Maude: There is nothing to prevent the Commission from making further proposals about anything which lies within its competence to do. In the same way, there is nothing to stop anyone making a legislative proposal in this House. However, we are discussing the final step along the road. The Commission has accepted the concerns expressed by our Government and the proposals reflect those concerns. Fears that there will suddenly be another tranche of proposals are misguided.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Surely it means that the derogation could be ended unilaterally without consultation with us and without our consent.

Mr. Maude: For the derogation to be ended would require the Commission to make a proposal which would have to be agreed by a qualified majority. That would have to be negotiated in the usual way and, as with this proposal, the United Kingdom and Ireland would not, alone, have a blocking minority. There is no reason to suppose——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is not for ever then?

Mr. Maude: Nothing is for ever, as the hon. Gentleman knows. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the Commission has any desire to introduce further measures.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I initiated the early-day motion on this issue and the Minister will know that I should be pleased to hear an unequivocal answer from him about the requirement that a date be

[Mr. David Blunkett]

eventually set. That is the issue tonight. It is not whether there will be a delay in having to fix a date to do away with the pint and the mile but whether, eventually, a date will be set to which a British Goverment, now or in the future, will have to adhere. Therefore, the evil day has been put off, but it has not been put aside.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who is sitting next to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), is familiar with the 1979 directive. It is framed in such a way that this proposal must provide the dates to be set and the only legal means which enables this country to have the final say on when or whether the units are discontinued is the form in which the proposal is expressed. In practical terms, it enables this country to have the last say on whether the units are retained. It has not been easy to find a form of words within the constraints of the last directive that allows that position to come about. It has been achieved, however, and I must now seek to persuade other member states of the Community that it is an acceptable compromise which should be supported.

The second proposal covers the fathom, the therm, the pint and the fluid ounce for returnable beer, cider and soft drink bottles, and the pound and ounce for goods weighed out for or by the consumer. We would be able to continue to authorise these units for these purposes until the end of the century.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Given that weighed-out loose goods, weighed out from bulk in front of the consumer, are not items which are traded across the Community, what possible reason can there be to require a small shopkeeper to refuse to serve a consumer 5 lb of potatoes or 1 lb of peas from bulk goods? What will happen to the shopkeeper or consumer if, after the set date, the customer asks for, and the shopkeeper serves, 5 lb of potatoes?

Mr. Maude: Under the present weights and measures legislation, which has been in existence, subject to amendment from time to time, for a long time, it is, and has been for many years, a criminal offence to sell goods in measures which are not authorised under the legislation. The consequence of this directive would be that at the appropriate time—which, if this proposal remains in the directive, would not need to be until the end of the century—we would have to amend our domestic legislation according to these proposals.

Mr. Beith: What is the answer to my question?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of the fact that it is possible for the trading standards authorities to prosecute people now who sell goods in quantities and units which are not authorised under the legislation. There is nothing novel about that. *[Interruption.]* Amendments have been made continually to the list of such authorised units over many years.

Mr. Beith: Is the Minister seriously saying that he envisages that weights and measures inspectors will prosecute little old ladies for buying 5 lb of loose potatoes after 1999?

Mr. Maude: It would not be a criminal offence for the customer to buy goods in those circumstances. It would be, as it is now, a criminal offence for a trader to sell goods in units which are not authorised, and there is nothing novel about that. The hon. Gentleman should know that. If he is asking whether trading standards officers will do it, my answer is that it will be a matter for those officers. But I should be surprised if, on the day after these measures come into operation, trading standards officers will be stamping around the streets trying to find people selling goods in pounds and ounces. If the hon. Gentleman believes that is a possibility, he has a lesser view than I do of the enforcement officers.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I asked my hon. Friend, in effect, if I was right in believing that what is proposed was fixed until 31 December 1999 and I understood him to say that there was no termination date. Technically that is true. But he went on to say that the pint and the mile could be used until the end of the century. That was precisely the point I questioned him on.

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend asked me specifically about the pint for dispensing draught beer and cider and the mile. That was the first proposal I outlined and the answer I gave her was correct. There is no requirement for a termination date to be set. I am now dealing with the second proposal in the draft directive which covers the pint for other purposes—for returnable beer, cider and soft drink bottles—and it will remain possible for the United Kingdom and Ireland to authorise those units until the end of the century. I hope that that makes it clear to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Blunkett: To enable me to sleep easy in my bed, may I ask the Minister to explain into which category will fall the best service we in this country enjoy, the service that is most reliable and which we take for granted—the delivery of our pint of milk?

Mr. Maude: The pint of milk delivered to the doorstep falls into the first category. It will remain with this country to set an authorisation date, if and when we decide to do that.

The third proposal covers all the other remaining imperial units set out in chapter three of the 1979 directive. Those could continue to be authorised until the beginning of 1995. Special provisions for the troy ounce for bullion dealing would be made which recognise the international status of that unit. The proposals would also allow imperial units to continue to be used as supplementary indications to the marking in metric units until the end of the century. That would allow dual marking, which would enable us to provide a transitional period for consumers to become fully familiar with those metric units that will be used.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I have been reflecting on what the Minister said to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett). Does he mean that dairies that deliver milk to the doorstep and also supply supermarkets will have to have different sizes of bottles after 1999 for each type of delivery? Will it be possible for supermarkets to continue to sell pints of milk?

Mr. Maude: It will be up to dairies to decide what to do. It is already possible for dairies to supply milk in metric units and some do so. It will remain open to dairies to choose which unit to use for doorstep deliveries. The permanent derogation, which is what it amounts to, would

apply only to milk being delivered in returnable containers. It would be possible for milk to be sold in supermarkets in returnable containers in the same units in which it is delivered to the doorstep.

Mr. Skinner: Will we be able to buy these things at Harrods?

I have not finished; that was just an introduction. Is there not something sick about the Common Market? Bureaucrats who are well paid with British taxpayers' money have spent countless hours on this. Every family in Britain pays £16 a week to prop up this unmitigated disaster of a Common Market. The Minister is pouring out a load of gobbledegook based on trying to regulate milk bottles and stop old ladies buying loose tatties. What a state we have got into. The Minister should take it back to the Common Market and tell them to get stuffed.

Mr. Maude: As always, the hon. Gentleman is full of splendid advice. He should have put those comments to his hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) in 1978-79. Perhaps he did. The directive is the result of a legal obligation and arises from the directive negotiated by the last Labour Government and agreed with modifications and further safeguards by the present Government. It places on the Community an obligation to produce a further directive and agree it by the end of the year.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) did raise the matter with me, but I am afraid that he remains a convinced imperialist.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) clearly failed to persuade the hon. Member for Norwood at that time.

We have consulted over 700 interested groups, from industry, trade, enforcement authorities and consumer bodies. Some of those consulted, including the National Consumer Council and the National Federation of Consumer Groups, have urged that the interests of consumers would be better served by the completion of metrication by the end of 1992 with no derogations at all. I cannot agree with that, because the Commission's proposals would allow such further changes as are necessary to be undertaken in a cautious and considered way, with the minimum disruption to consumers or industry. It would allow to continue to be used units for which the public have great affection and in respect of which it cannot be seriously argued that they constitute barriers to trade.

In respect of those units where such an argument does exist, the proposals allow us to move sensibly and without undue haste. I should stress that these proposals affect the use of imperial units only for the purposes of trade.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I missed what he said when he was talking about the consultation exercise. In the accompanying documents there is mention of a very disappointing response. In what respect was the response disappointing? How many of the 700 groups that were asked to comment were in favour of what the Commission is suggesting?

Mr. Maude: There were two responses which were hostile to the spirit of further metrication, a number which were neutral and some, to which I have just referred, which urged that we should move more quickly. I do not believe that those representations reflect a widespread view and I do not believe that we should move more quickly than these proposals allow.

Mr. Kennedy: On a further factual point, given that there were two that were hostile, a few that were non-committal and several that said something else, what were the total number of responses from the 700 that were circulated?

Mr. Maude: I can probably find how many responses there were. The consultation, which was widespread, did not elicit very strong views in any direction. The volume of correspondence which the proposals generated was not great and it seems to me that this is not an issue on which feelings are as deep as they were some time ago. Metrication has been growing organically. More and more goods are being sold and bought in metric units and as a result people are now very much more familiar with the use of these units.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Something just dawned on me, to my mounting horror. We shall not be expected to give litres of blood in future, shall we?

Mr. Maude: I did not catch the hon. Gentleman's question, but I suspect it was not serious.

I was saying that these measures apply only to purposes of trade and not to measurements which are only a matter of custom and practice. It would not become necessary, as some people have suggested, apparently seriously, to remeasure cricket pitches in metres and I see no reason why the use of imperial measures for non-trade purposes should not continue for as many years as people wish to use them.

There will of course be some costs in converting to the metric system. I believe, however, that the moderate nature of these proposals keeps these to a minimum.

There are also significant savings. The Institute of Production Engineers, for example, estimates the additional cost of dual manufacture and stockholding at 3 per cent. of turnover.

I believe therefore that these proposals represent an acceptable compromise and I hope that we shall be able to persuade other member states that they fulfil our legal obligations under the 1979 directive. I hope that the House will endorse the Government's stance on this matter.

10.38 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): It is clear that the draft directive before us today both confirms and reinforces the move to metrication, although it is true that it allows some latitude in this regard.

The subject of metrication obviously evokes a mixed response in Britain and, indeed—judging from my reading of earlier debates on the subject—in the House. Certainly a variety of views has been expressed on both sides of the House.

For some, the increasing use of metric measurements seems to strike a blow against the very nature of the British identity. Some feel a strong attachment to the imperial measurement system. Perhaps, like me, they were fascinated by the mysterious, romantic-sounding lists of measurements that used to feature on the back of school exercise books. For others, however, the pace of metrication seems all too slow, and many believe that more

[Ms. Joyce Quin]

rapid progress should be made. The timetable for metrication envisaged more than 20 years ago has been put back and many who most feared the move towards metrication at that time would no doubt be agreeably surprised that we are discussing this document tonight. Whatever the different views on the subject, one real danger is that we are in a half-and-half position which is highly confusing. A metric muddle is being created.

The Minister referred to previous directives on the subject and explained how this one fitted in. He also described the provisions of the directive. I wish to ask him some questions. It seems clear from the Minister's responses to interventions that, although under the directive the United Kingdom and Ireland can fix a time to phase out remaining imperial measurements, there is nothing to stop the Commission itself from introducing a revised directive to make the timetable speedier, if it so wishes. If the British Government fail to come up with a date, presumably that is what the Commission will do. If the Government fix a date that the Commission feels is unrealistically far into the future, will the Minister confirm that again the Commission could take action?

When the matter was first discussed, it was on the treaty base of article 100, which provided for a unanimous decision by member states, but the present directive will be decided by a majority vote. I have attended a European parliamentary committee which considered the directive and it seemed to me that most of the other countries had little interest in how, when, or even whether the United Kingdom and Ireland chose to phase out imperial measurements. Perhaps the Minister can confirm that that is so.

Can the Minister also let us know whether, in his discussions on the matter, he has met other EEC Ministers? Many of us feel that too many of these decisions are taken by officials, often in the secretive workings of COREPER, the committee of permanent representatives, and that there is very little political input.

The mile is one example of a measurement for which the United Kingdom can decide on the changeover date. As the mile is not a barrier to trade, it would be reasonable for the Government to make their own decision on what they want to do. Nevertheless, I should like to know whether they have made any estimate of the cost of changing from the mile to the metric system. Some people feel that the Government are hesitating more on cost grounds than on the principle.

I am glad that there has been a reference to the pint because it should be made clear, to counter misleading impressions in the press, that doorstep milk deliveries are not threatened by the directive. No doubt the Minister will wish to take the opportunity to stress that again.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) raised a valid point about the sale of loose goods. Surely we do not want to make it an offence in all cases for small local shops to continue to sell by imperial measurements.

On the point raised by the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) about consultation, will the Government tell us whether they plan further consultations on the directive, particularly since the response so far has not been adequate? I note that the Government's explanatory memorandum was vague on the cost of changing for shops and firms. Can the Minister give us any further details about that?

I hope that we could all agree that in implementing the directive there should be no unfair jacking up of prices. I hope that the Government will monitor the situation closely.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Lady may be aware of what is happening now in petrol garages. The Government have allowed garages to cease displaying the price of petrol per gallon. Some garages took the opportunity in the week when petrol prices rose to stop displaying the price in gallons so the motorist did not know the price per gallon.

Ms. Quin: The hon. Gentleman's point reinforces the case for vigilance with regard to transferring from one set of measurements to another. Consumer organisations have made that point strongly to me in the past few days.

Earlier I mentioned the danger of metric confusion. We often see a confusing mixture of measurements in shops. For example, I have seen carpets quoted in metric sizes, but the underlay price quoted in imperial measurements. Many DIY shops sell wood so many feet by so many feet by so many millimetres. The various consumer groups with which I have spoken are all concerned about the confusion. That also applies to consumer groups which are in favour of full metrication straight away, such as the National Federation of Consumer Groups and the Consumers Association, which is less keen.

I refer the Minister to the interesting work carried out by Lady Attlee and the metric sense campaign. Lady Attlee feels that the way in which metrication is used in Britain at present and the way in which we have introduced systeme internationale measurements has increased the confusion and made metrication less user-friendly or consumer-friendly than it ought to be. She made the point that very often millimetres are used to quote a size which would be much easier to understand if it were expressed in metres and centimetres. For example, the standard size of a bath is apparently given as 1,700 millimetres, while it seems to me and to the metric sense campaign that 1 m 70 cm would be a more reasonable way of expressing the size.

I hope that the Government will examine the suggestions from the metric sense campaign in trying to present the metrication that we already have in a way that is helpful and not confusing to consumers. That would make necessary changes easier to achieve.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Would my hon. Friend agree—*[Interruption.]* In this matter, we are all friends in this country against Europe. Does the hon. Lady agree that when we consider organisations which make things user-friendly it makes them sound like pet budgies or lapdogs? Why should it damage a united Europe for this country to do what it wants and for Europe to do what it wants when we bear in mind that half the world will still use imperial measures anyway? Why should it destroy Europe if we do what 95 per cent. of British people want us to do?

Ms. Quin: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's intervention detracts from the point that I was making. I was simply saying that the consumer has the right to proper information and to have measurements presented to him in an understandable way. The hon. Gentleman

seems to dislike the phrase "user-friendly", but it is common currency among consumer organisations, as I am sure that he appreciates. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I should be obliged if the debate at the far end of the Chamber would cease. It shows great discourtesy to the hon. Lady.

Ms. Quin: The Minister said that children are educated in the metric system. That is true, but when they leave school they step outside into a rather confused environment.

The Opposition are not officially opposing this take note motion, but we hope that the Minister will listen seriously and reply to questions that I have raised and that other hon. Members will raise during the debate. We do not like harmonisation for its own sake. We want to see a diversity of customs and traditions in the EC, but we recognise that moves to metrication have taken place and that common standards exist among many areas. However, if metrication is to be successful, it needs—I do not apologise for using the expression again—to be more user-friendly than it now is. It is vital that the Government take more fully into account the needs of the consumers as well as those of industry in the decisions that they are taking.

10.50 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I give a qualified welcome to the directive and memorandum that the Minister has presented. We should adopt the sort of programme that is being put forward tonight even if we were not a member of the EC. There is every reason for doing it for its own sake, not for the sake of harmonisation or because we happen to be a member of the EC.

My first qualification, which I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin), is that the use of the systeme internationale in the use of millimetres and other smaller measurements is not always appropriate, but, as a matter of practice, that does not occasion any difficulty. It does not seem to occasion any difficulty in Europe when we go on holiday, and it will not occasion any real difficulty here.

My second qualification is that the programme prolongs the agony by preserving—for example, in terms of traffic—the mile, the yard and the inch. I see no reason why the heights of bridges that are used by international traffic should not be set out in metres rather than in feet and inches; why the stopping distances on the motorways should not be in terms of 100 m, 200 m and so forth. The golden rule, followed in many other countries, is that if one wants to change from imperial to metric it should be as full and rapid a change as possible. The conversion from one method to another fails so long as one goes along with a dual signification. It is no good trying to have two languages of measurement working at the same time.

However, there is no reason why the traditional measures of a pint of beer or milk should not be preserved. Or we could have 568 ml, which is exactly the same size. The fact that we change from one system of measurement to another does not mean that we need to change the size or the weight of things; it is simply to change the way in which we measure things, and so I welcome this.

The case for metrication is overwhelming. First, there is the sheer beauty and simplicity of the metric system, which has been endorsed, embraced and developed by many British scientists. Many of the metric measures are named after prominent British scientists such as Newton. He was around some time ago and had no problems with the metric system.

A cube with a 10 cm base contains exactly 1,000 cc and 1,000 ml. Filled with water, it weighs exactly 1 kg. If its heat is raised by 1 deg C one has another measurement of heat. Put against something else it is a measurement of force. It is a beautiful and delightful system with a particular simplicity. Anybody who tried to do physics at school, learning foot pounds, will know exactly what I mean.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) can say how many square yards there are in an acre.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: But I do not need to know that.

Mr. Fraser: It is very much better that an area of land should be measured in hectares, which are units of 100 metres, rather than in one chain times one furlong, which is 4,840 square yards. I suggest that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, try working out the area of something that measures 3 ft 7½ in by 5 ft 8½ in. It is impossible to do without using a calculator.

Metrication does not mean that one has to change the size, speed or weight of anything. It just provides a different and easier set of relationships.

Every country has changed or is changing to metric, with three exceptions: the United States, Ireland and the United Kingdom. For an exporting industrial nation, we are crazy to pursue a different and more difficult system of measurement. Moreover, two generations or more of our children have been educated in the metric system, and I do not find that pensioners on trips to France, Spain or Portugal have any difficulty coping with metrication. I do not underestimate the intelligence or adaptability of the people whom I represent.

Furthermore, we have largely changed to metric already. As a result of changes that I made as Minister of State, virtually every prepackaged item of food is sold in metric quantities, as are coal and petrol. I shall illustrate how crazy it is to retain the imperial system in industrial terms. For a long time, this country imposed a huge cost penalty on itself by manufacturing petrol pumps for the rest of the world which dispensed in metric quantities, and which then involved the extra expense of being converted to dispense petrol in imperial quantities, simply because of our own eccentricity. That makes no industrial sense.

There is no way that we can export in imperial sizes products such as drills and fasteners to other industrial countries, which consider our use of that system to be eccentric, unusable and unacceptable. Our failure to adapt to the metric system says something about our failure as an industrial nation.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that one must take into account also small shopkeepers weighing out 1 lb of raisins. The hon. Gentleman admits that it is his fault that in my constituency small shopkeepers have been visited by weights and measures officers warning that the practice of weighing out a few bags of raisins in advance and putting them on the shelf so that a customer does not have to wait renders those shopkeepers liable to prosecution. Is the hon. Gentleman proud of that?

Mr. Fraser: Yes, I am, and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. If one is to help the shopper make a true price comparison between one item and another, it is no use having that product packaged in a multiplicity of sizes. The right way is that which I introduced for biscuits, for which there was a monstrous arrangement of different sizes.

Butter has been packaged in metric sizes for a long time. It is sold in packs of 125, 250 or 500 g, which makes it easy to make a price comparison. The same applies in comparing the prices of large and small packets of raisins. The little old lady whom the hon. Gentleman has in mind will get ripped off only if raisins, fruit or whatever come in a range of sizes that make it difficult to compare the price of one packet with another.

When those changes were made, they enjoyed the total support of consumer organisations across the country. They were made not for any ideological reason but to make life easier for the consumer, in the same way that life is made easier for the consumer when petrol is sold in one single measure instead of in both gallons and litres, which results in enormous confusion. The hon. Member for Selly

Oak and his supporters—the imperialists who want to embalm and preserve the imperial system—are demonstrating not independence but insularity.

It would be senseless to drive into metrication overnight, but no one can accuse us of doing that. The French revolution embraced metrication more than 200 years ago. If we moved into the metric system quickly, we would give Japanese scale manufacturers and so on an enormous advantage in coming into our market. That is why it should be phased in over a period.

There is a beauty, simplicity, ease and saving in the long term in using the metric system. We should endorse it for our own sake. There have been many changes in measurement in the past, and the time has come to make a resolution, over a due period, to adopt the system which the rest of the world is going to use. If we refuse to do that, it says something about us as a manufacturing and exporting country and about our failure to do business with the rest of the world.

11.2 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I must admit that when I came to this debate I had not anticipated the kind of orgasmic enthusiasm that we have just heard from the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who is obviously under the impression that he is still the Minister putting forward the measure. At least my hon. Friend the Minister had the decency to appear resigned and incredulous about the measure that he was supporting, but the hon. Member for Norwood actually purported to believe in what he was saying.

As the hon. Member for Norwood rightly pointed out, 200 years ago one of the consequences of the French revolution was the introduction of metrication and decimalisation in France. Indeed, the French went even further and decimalised the week. The 10-day week was not terribly popular, however, because it meant that people had one day off every 10 days rather than every seven. I have no doubt that, in due course, some earnest committee in the European Parliament and some earnest bureaucrat in the Commission will decimilise all the other things to which we are accustomed—not just the days of the week but clocks, times and everything else.

I listened to my hon. Friend the Minister who had the misfortune to have to try to make a fist of the subject today, but who is clearly a man of too great sensibility to believe in the case that his position in Government obliges him to put forward. As I listened to him I thought of the Peter Simple column in *The Daily Telegraph*——

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman was in favour of the Common Market.

Mr. Hamilton: I certainly was not in favour of the Common Market. I was one of the two members of the national executive committee of the Conservative party who voted against it in 1971. I voted against it in the 1975 referendum and to the best of my recollection I have not supported any Common Market measures since I have been in the House. As usual, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is misinformed.

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that when it came to putting a guillotine on the single European market legislation he was not in the same Lobby as those of us who were against that legislation?

Mr. Hamilton: When it comes to guillotining the hon. Gentleman and his supporters, I am always to be found in the Government Lobby, but that has nothing to do with the point at issue.

As I listened to my hon. Friend the Minister, I thought back to Dr. Heinz Kiosk, the chief psychiatric adviser to the plastic stair-rod advisory council, and his effusions in the Peter Simple column of *The Daily Telegraph*. I contented myself with the knowledge that my hon. Friend did not believe in the case that he put forward.

I am astonished that the Labour party—which is now attempting to become voter-friendly, in the same way as the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) talked about becoming user-friendly—is supporting this measure, but perhaps I should not be too astonished as it is a highly Socialist and bureaucratic measure. I find it difficult to understand why any Government should wish to legislate for the weights and measures of this country. A free market Government should leave it to consumers to decide the measures in which they wish to buy goods on sale in the shops. If they prefer to buy in pounds, ounces or gallons, why should the Government interfere? That preference does not prejudice the achievement of a single market in the European Community which, by and large, I support because I believe in free trade, and these matters have no bearing on the wider European horizon which, if we believe in it, is supposed to be our reason for membership of the European Community.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to consultation. As we know, groups that are consulted by Government to discover what consumers believe often do not represent the views of the man in the street. If we had an opinion poll on whether this measure is acceptable to British people, 95 per cent. or more would be opposed to it.

I appreciate that power politics are involved here. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, we do not have a blocking minority in the Council of Ministers, so I accept that force majeure, as a consequence of the Single European Act, means that we shall have no influence on what I regard as an important measure.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that, although we are making it a criminal offence to sell in pounds and ounces or pints and gallons, we have some refuge in the fact that this law will not be enforced. It seems extraordinary that this proposal will be a dead letter as soon as it is introduced.

I register my regret that the Government, for whatever reason, are giving credence to an unnecessary measure, which goes against the essence of what we have been trying to do since 1979—to elevate the consumer and his choices above those dictated by bureaucrats.

11.6 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): There is all-party agreement that the Government find themselves in a difficult position here, as they have on other harmonisation measures, especially emotive and traditional ones such as feet and inches and pints and litres. Essentially, within the context of Europe, the Government are trying to square a circle and have it both ways. In that respect, they are handling it as constructively as they can.

Having listened to the Minister, I suspect that we are stuck with a European fait accompli. As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, we do not

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

understand how, under the European voting mechanisms, the safeguards to which the Minister referred will be assured.

Mr. Skinner: What is the Scottish nationalists' view of the issue?

Mr. Kennedy: I shall come to that in a moment. Only Britain and Ireland are in an imperialistic position, so I do not understand how there will be any safeguard if we accept the spirit and substance of the directive. The Minister is not to blame because the issue was decided a long time ago.

The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) just mentioned the views of the Scottish National party, to which I do not subscribe, but were an independent Scotland represented on the Council of Ministers it could give the Republic of Ireland and England and Wales the force of its arguments and vote. This would be a good opportunity for Scottish National party Members to make that point, but they are not present.

On the question of practice within this country, again, the Minister is saying what his hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) has just said is absolutely correct. The Minister has said, "We will introduce this" but in response to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and others he has said, "Don't worry. We will be turning a blind eye to things. We will not be implementing it or following it up." *[Interruption.]* He is dissenting from that, but he gave the clear impression that it would be technically illegal for a trader to serve loose goods, for example, in the corner shop example mentioned by my hon. Friend. I cannot remember the exact phrase he used, but he spoke about how the inspectors would obviously be treating this with sensitivity, and the impression left with Labour Members, and I think with Conservative Members too, was that it would render nugatory the entire effect of the measure.

Mr. Maude: I am happy to repeat what I said, although not perhaps in the exact words. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) was perhaps giving the impression that the day after any such measures came into operation there would be jack-booted trading standards officers roaming around the streets, seeking out small shopkeepers who were using imperial measures. All I was saying was that that was absurd. That is not the way in which trading standards officers operate, but that is not to say that this would be a dead letter; it would become a criminal offence for traders to sell in unauthorised units, as it is now, and I stress that we have a Weights and Measures Act which makes it illegal to use certain measures at the moment.

Mr. Kennedy: It seems to be a ministerial endorsement of circumspect illegality, as far as I can see, or a softly-softly approach. That may be sensible and welcome, but we, as a country, cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Beith: I never mentioned jack boots. I have never seen a trading standards officer in jack boots. They normally dress rather as hon. Members here are dressed. They simply come along, as I have known them do in my constituency, and challenge traders for illegally dispensing packaged goods in non-metric quantities, and it seems to me certain that those same officers will come along within a short time of this legislation coming into force and tell traders that they must stop meeting the requests of old ladies who say, "Please will you give me 5 lb of potatoes". For that situation to prevail in this country seems to be plainly ludicrous.

Mr. Kennedy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I think, in view of his reservoir of constituency experience, it is clearly something the DTI may want to look at as a matter of policy.

The Minister spoke about the consultation exercise. I very much agree with the hon. Member for Tatton that the Minister is either misreading the public mood or indulging in what would be quite understandable wishful thinking, given the measure he has to defend and, indeed, clarify for the House, in saying that the response to that consultation exercise would mirror attitudes in the country as a whole. That really is an exercise in wishful thinking by the Minister. Given that public opinion will be, I should have thought, rather strong on these matters, it would be as well either for the Government to launch a fresh consultative exercise or at least to embark on a programme of public education on inevitable changes towards metrication.

Secondly, in the DTI's own analysis reference is properly made to transitional periods, some of which will stretch over a decade and more. None the less, I hope that the DTI, or the relevant sponsoring departments in other parts of Government, will be sympathetic to any transitional difficulties which industries or small businesses will encounter as a result of having to change working practices and, perhaps, machinery or implements for the conduct of their business. I hope that the Government will respond positively to that point.

It is obvious that enthusiasm, or the lack of it, for this measure crosses party boundaries. My party will treat this as a conscience issue. The only point on which I seek a categorical assurance is that we shall continue to be able to talk about, to raise glasses of and to down drams well into the future.

11.15 pm

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): I am grateful to be called so that I may apologise for not being here for the whole of the debate.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), who clearly understands, as only a member of his party could, people who are proposing a schizophrenic situation. He said that his party would treat the issue as a matter of conscience and would vote both ways upon it. I remind him of the words of Mr. Gladstone at the time of the Turkish-Bulgarian difficulties. He said that he regarded it as a great insult that he had been accused of being a democrat.

If harmonisation, whatever that may mean, is to be undertaken, surely it is unwise to undertake it on the basis of the wrong system.

Mr. Skinner: Very profound.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I am glad that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) understands that simple concept.

I was the Member of Parliament who saved the mile. Under the Labour Government of 1974 to 1979 it was to be abolished on the basis that it would be an industrial danger to Britain if the mile were not the same as the kilometre. I asked the Minister how many things were

measured in miles. I said that we do not measure miles of baked beans or miles of wire. Eventually the mile was saved. I see that the mile that I saved in the face of the idiocies of the then Government's concepts is again under threat.

If we harmonise measurements, why not get right the concept of the measurements that we intend to harmonise? My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) referred to the fact that during the French revolution there was a 10-day week.

Mr. Skinner: Not in here.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: If there is one concept on which measurements and mathematics are badly based, it is the repeat factor of 10. The decimal system is idiotic. If 10 per cent. is added to 10, we get 11—a prime factor that is useless. If we take 10 per cent. away from 10, that leads to nine, which is three times three. That is equally useless. A repeat system of counting should be at two squared, two cubed or two to the power of four, which is the best. Very few people understand it, but—

Mr. Skinner: I am waiting for the hon. and learned Gentleman to get to the mirrored J curve.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: The hon. Gentleman may feed me good lines, but he can do better than that.

Mr. Skinner: The mirrored J curve was what Woy Jenkins was into.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: I do not know what Woy Jenkins was into, but I should be vewy suwpwised if he did not buy his clawet in dozens. At least under the duodecimal system it involves 2 squared by 3. If people are asked how much cake they want, they do not ask for a fifth of it. They say, "Halve it and halve it again", so two is the concept. People count on their fingers not because there are 10 of them, but because they are there. It would not matter if they had three fingers or 23 fingers on each hand, people would still count to 10. People with four fingers still count to 10. It is a fatuous concept that 10 is holy. As a counting system, 10 is the worst figure on which to base trade. It has no concept in sensible measurement or arithmetical relevance.

When we used the imperial system, at least children in school had to use their minds instead of a calculator or an easy system. Children can do their 10 times table, but it does not exercise their minds; they should know the other tables to understand the importance of arithmetical measurements. The sensible systems—the pint, the yard, the mile—all have much more relevant bases for intelligent measurement than any decimal system.

We are discussing a European matter. The measurement from which Europe started was the duodecimal system, the Roman system, which was a much more intelligent basic system.

If we are to change the system to a common system, we should change it to the right system, not to a stupid system. The decimal system is a foolish system. It has no helpful basis in trade; it costs enormous funds because of the complication of its mathematical incidences. If we are to change, let us stand up for a system of counting whereby the change is either at 12 or 6, thus making a major salvation in the costs of industry. In all seriousness, let us not move to something just because we do not understand that the repeat system is wrongly based. If we are all to use the same repeat system and the same weights system, let us use the most commercially sensible one.

11.23 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): The absurdity in the mess of arrangements for the use of imperial and metric measurement that we have heard about tonight is principally because the European Community has bent over backwards to take account of British and Irish sensibilities over weights and measures systems.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) said, it would have been far better had we moved much more quickly to the metric system, rather than maintained the imperial system with it. What hon. Members seem to forget is that at least those of us of my generation have children going through school who are being taught the metric system of weights and measures and are perfectly able to cope with all that that means. If there are difficulties for older people like the lady—she could be in my constituency or in the constituency of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—who wants 5 lb of potatoes, the enterprising shopkeeper will sell her 2·27 kg and not worry about what the weights and measures people may say.

The use of two different systems at present gives rise to absurd situations. For example, as is my wont, I was doing the family's weekly shopping last Saturday at Leo's co-operative retail superstore in Pyle, in my constituency, and I happened to buy some coleslaw, of a reduced dressing variety, loose across the counter. It was sold in imperial units. As I wandered across towards where the prepackaged variety was on sale I thought that I would check to see whether I had got a bargain. Of course, the prepackaged variety was being sold in 227 g packs. Only because I knew that this is as close as we can get to half a pound was I able to make the calculation.

It would be perfectly easy to have common quantities displayed in both metric and imperial measurements for, say, the next 10 years to enable people, like some here who seem to find difficulty in using the metric system, to use it in an intelligent way. If there is concern about the doorstep pinta, the milkman can sell it as 0·5683 litre. Then we would know that we still had our pinta.

We are making a lot of fuss about something that is really not all that important provided that the public know exactly what they are getting. There is no need to be afraid of this directive. In fact, there is provision for the measurements that are used most commonly domestically —for example, the pint and the mile—to be protected for a very long time. I anticipate that no hon. Member need worry about being forced to give up the nomenclature "pint" when he is buying in a pub or picking up the pinta at the doorstep.

This is really a fear of facing the future—things that our children are currently being taught in school. The fuss that we are making about this directive is indicative of the general problems that we face in meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

11.28 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I rise to make a brief plea for the continuance of the mixed system. We have a classic example of that system, of course, in the motor car. When W. O. Bentley set out to design his motor

[Mr. Hugo Summerson]

car in 1919 he said that it would be a 3 litre model. The wheel base was in feet and inches, and the car developed so much horse power—imperial horse power, not metric horse power. From the birth of the motor car this was the system of measurement of power and engine size, and we have all understood it.

In any case—going from that form of transport to the railway train—we all know that the gauge of the track in this country is 4 ft $8\frac{1}{2}$ in, and I defy anyone to express that in metric terms. I fear that if one were to go to any British Rail workshop and say, "In future we are going to have tracks of 1·853322 m" there would be even more engines off the rails than there are at present.

The House will recall that in George Orwell's "1984" Winston Smith bought an old man a drink in a pub which served nothing but litres and half litres. The old man said that half a litre was not enough and that one litre was too much as it set his bladder running. That is a classic example of "metricism". We are faced with a tyranny and hon. Members should remember that poor man in "1984". It is clear that the pint is designed for the British stomach.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke about the little old lady who buys 5 lb of potatoes. Apart from the fact that if she does that with regularity she will be little no longer, she understands what 5 lb of potatoes looks like, as we do. We all understand what a 15-stone or an 18-stone man looks like. If I went to meet a stranger and somebody else told me that he weighed 200 kg I would not have a clue about him. Does that mean he is enormous or little? If I were told that he weighed 15 stone I would know the sort of person for whom I would have to look out.

I do not like all the talk about "phasing in" as it represents an uncertain process. The next thing will be a proposal, "phased in during two years", that we all drive on the right-hand side of the road. What a recipe for disaster. I suppose that, first, we shall have lorries driving on the right, followed by buses. The whole thing would be a complete muddle.

I am always worried when I hear of Governments giving "permission" for things as that implies that Governments have more in their gift than they actually have to give. My hon. Friend the Minister should keep a wary eye on the Commission on the other side of the Channel. Any further proposals to do away with the imperial measures, which we all know and which the man on the Walthamstow omnibus understands, will receive short shrift.

11.32 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I shall be brief as I know that this debate has to end shortly. I want to put down the marker that I do not like the directive and I do not like the idea that the proposal would authorise the United Kingdom and Ireland to fix a date for ending the use of miles, yards, feet and inches, even though the Minister may say that the Government will not exercise that right.

If this legislature had any sort of adequate scrutiny over the flood of statutory instruments which pour out of Departments at the rate of more than 2,000 per year, it might be arguable that all hon. Members could keep an eagle eye out for any Minister, who is but a pawn in the hands of civil servants, slipping one or two subclauses into a subparagraph of a statutory instrument—which is not amendable in any case—to get rid of the mile, the yard, the foot or the inch. In reality, however, this place does not give adequate scrutiny to statutory instruments, and any change to our measurements will be implemented by such means rather than by primary legislation.

The Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments cannot report on the merits of a statutory instrument; it can report only on its technicalities. A statutory instrument cannot be amended and I do not believe that we have the power to keep an adequate grip on Government to stop some surge of ambition by a Minister deciding to metricate. I view the proposal before us with great caution.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) has already said, it is not true that industry has been progressively metricated. We have not, for example, adopted universally the metric thread, which is a basic component of engineering. We consider ourselves to be a manufacturing nation, albeit less so under the present Government. There is American fine thread and unified thread, both of which are a basic requirement for any country exporting motor vehicles. The notion that metrication is a basic prerequisite to building up our manufacturing base to achieve more exports is not universally true. Millions of people use miles, yards, feet and inches as a matter of convenience and we should continue with the duality. If it is convenient for consumers to do that, why not let them do it? Why should we not retain gallons rather than litres as a matter of consumer choice?

It would be to our advantage in many respects to stay as we are. We would not have to calibrate instruments again. If people want the option of using metric measurements, they can use them, but I object to this creeping harmonisation for no purpose other than the harmonising of everything that the Commission can get its hands on.

In view of what the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) said about changing the side of the road on which we drive, I warn the House that there is a strong desire on the part of the members of the transport committee of the EEC to make us do that. It is the stated aim of many in the Strasbourg assembly that we should make that change. Let us retain the dual system of weights and measures and let this directive meander on for the next 40 years while we do nothing about it. I hope that hon. Members will take that view and vote against it today.

11.37 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): These debates take place late at night for a good reason—in a sense, they reflect the twilight of the power of the House of Commons.

Mr. Skinner: You can say that again.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It matters not that we have spoken about this issue for an hour and a half. Indeed, whether or not we vote on it does not matter——

Mr. Skinner: It matters to us.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: —because what is proposed will happen all the same. These debates take place simply to humour us.

Mr. Skinner: Humour?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Do you agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that if the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) wants to take part in the debate he should do so in a civilised way like the rest of us?

Mr. Skinner: Frankly, I get fed up listening to this sort of hypocrisy from Tory Members who take part in debates on EEC directives and often speak against them, but when it comes to a vote, as it will today, they—and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) in particular—are missing as usual.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Despite the cleverness of the hon. Member for Bolsover—I have his permission to say how clever he is—it is no good him saying that one is missing from this or that vote on a Common Market issue. Which Government sold this country out?

Mr. Skinner: I did not vote for it.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It is no good the hon. Gentleman saying that he did not vote for it. He is not the only member of the Labour party.

Mr. Skinner: Get on with it.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Madam Deputy Speaker, do you intend to control this debate or is the hon. Member for Bolsover——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) intend to proceed with his speech?

Mr. Skinner: That is a good question.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: If you intend to allow this sort of hectoring to go on minute after minute, hour after hour, we shall have no debate——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Selly Oak does his share of hectoring. Does he intend to continue his speech, or shall I call the Minister to reply to the debate?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I am deeply wounded that you should suggest such a thing of me, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I repeat that our votes on these directives matter not at all. We are given an hour and a half's debate to humour us. If we voted unanimously against what is proposed, it would still happen. That is why it is a waste of time having these debates and voting at the end of them.

11.39 pm

Mr. Maude: This has been a fascinating debate in which contributions have ranged from the crusty reaction of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), to the radicalism of the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and the revolutionary approach of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn). Not content merely that we should oppose any further move towards metrication, my hon. and learned Friend thinks that we should unravel the whole system of counting and should abandon 10 as the base for anything. I fall neatly in the middle in this interesting debate.

I take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) who says that such debates are simply for show and mean nothing. They are important, especially when they take place at an early stage in negotiations. That is the case with this debate. Such debates genuinely allow the Government to gauge mood and they inform the negotiating process. I should be disappointed if any hon. Member felt that contributions to the debate are not noted. They are noted and fulfil an extremely important purpose.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Is it right that this proposal was put forward in an explanatory memorandum in January? My hon. Friend the Minister has taken the opportunity to bring the measure before the House long before the Council of Ministers has to make a decision, which is expected before the end of the year. I congratulate the Minister on bringing this matter to the House so that it can express an opinion.

Mr. Maude: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That has been our intention and, as I say, matters are at an early stage of negotiation. The European Parliament has not yet made a final decision and there is still some way to go.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) is making her debut on the Opposition Front Bench, but if she is I warmly congratulate her on her appointment. We have faced each other in Committee. She made a distinguished contribution to the debate.

The hon. Lady asked whether the Commission might produce another proposal, but I have nothing to add to what I have said. As hon. Members know, there is nothing to prevent the Commission from producing further proposals, but there is no reason to suppose that it proposes to do so.

The form of words used in the group of measures, which it is in our power to retain for as long as we wish, is the most liberal—if I may use that word—that it is possible under law for the Commission to propose. There is no possibility under the law of that being further amended.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East and some of my hon. Friends asked about consultation. There were approximately 140 responses to the 700 letters that we sent out. Only two were firmly against the proposals and the others were in favour or neutral. I repeat that the consultation and the fairly wide publicity that the proposals received in the media did not elicit very strong feelings in one direction or the other. On that basis we have gone forward with the discussions.

The hon. Lady asked whether there would be further consultations. I do not anticipate further public consultations this side of the directive being agreed. At some time in future when domestic legislation has to be amended to give effect to the directive, it will be right to have detailed and extensive consultation about the way in which the directive is implemented and its timing. Of course I give the undertaking that that will take place.

The hon. Lady asked about costs and whether the mile could be argued to be a barrier to trade. There are those who argue that the continued use of the mile is a barrier to trade. We do not agree that it is a significant one, but car manufacturers have to produce cars with two different distance meters. That is, of course, a trifling inconvenience compared with that of having to put the steering wheel on the other side. None the less, it is argued by some to be a barrier to trade, but it is in our estimation a trifling one.

[Mr. Maude]

The cost of converting road signs into metric units would be very large indeed. It would be in the region, we estimate, of £30 million to £50 million, and clearly that is a powerful reason for not proceeding.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport) rose——

Mr. Maude: I must not give way because I have only one minute to go and I have a little more to say.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) paid me a slightly backhanded compliment—I hope that I am correct in referring to it as a compliment. He referred to specific requests for transitional periods. A number of those have been made and as far as possible they have been accommodated in the proposals. The hon. Member asked whether he and his constituents would continue to be able to drink drams and I can confirm that they will. I shall be happy to join him for one as soon as the debate is finished.

It being one and a half hours after commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 27.

Division No. 155] **[11.46 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chope, Christopher
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
French, Douglas
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Kennedy, Charles
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Lang, Ian
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maude, Hon Francis
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory
and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Fyfe, Maria
Haynes, Frank
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Janman, Tim
Lewis, Terry
Livsey, Richard
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Nellist, Dave
Pike, Peter L.
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 4102/89 on units of measurement; and welcomes the proposals as providing adequate transitional periods to enable businesses and consumers to adapt and become used to the new measurements.

Driver Licensing

11.56 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10357/1/88 on driver licensing; and endorses the Government's objective of negotiating satisfactory amendments with respect to the drivers of non-commercial minibuses and light goods vehicles, drivers from other Member States resident in the United Kingdom, and disabled drivers.

The ratio of risk for a passenger travelling in a minibus is less than half that of someone travelling in a car. It is one sixty fifth of someone travelling on a motor bike.

One part of the Commission's proposals on driver licensing is that minibus drivers should be required to take a public service vehicle test and after the age of 45 should be required to take regular medicals. That is unacceptable. If the British licensing system for minibuses applied throughout the European Community, instead of there being 10 million passenger journeys a year in voluntary minibuses there would be 50 million or more. The groups that benefit from the voluntary minibus system in Britain, often in buses provided by the Lord's Taverners or in the Variety Club's Sunshine coaches, would increase so that children, young people, youth organisations, Church groups, students and the elderly, including war veterans, terms translatable throughout the rest of Europe, would also benefit. That would provide extra advantages, extra mobility and, as I have emphasised, extra safety.

In considering European Community draft directives we want to maintain and enhance safety and mobility. Other countries will raise other points about this draft directive.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): How could the European Commissioner responsible for this proposal —Mr. Stanley Clinton Davis who used to be a Member of this House—have written a letter claiming that he had steered the proposal through the Commission in the light of the facts that my hon. Friend has just provided for the House?

Mr. Bottomley: There are some things that I cannot answer. It is common ground between the Commissioner emeritus, myself and hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Mobility Alliance, which represents many of the groups which would be affected by this part of the proposal, has been praised by ex-Commissioner Clinton Davis. If he and I respect the work that it does, we should respect its opinion. I think that it is right to say that the present Commissioner, Mr. van Miert, is willing to look at the matter again. I do not want to turn this into a personal attack and that is why I responded to the rather extraordinary letter of 14 December in the way that I did. That may have been a mistake. Perhaps I should have invited a punch up, but I cannot believe that the evidence is not so clear that in time the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and, I hope, the Commission will come together and acknowledge that Britain has developed a system of transportation which will be of value throughout the EC and which should be protected in Britain and be allowed to spread.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the level of injuries, accidents or deaths is high, given the vehicle densities it is the lowest in Europe?

Mr. Bottomley: That is right. We are way behind some European countries on pedestrian safety, but we are way ahead in the provision of non-commercial transport for groups with special interests or needs and with community interests such as students. When students go to another college to play water polo—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) may laugh, but that is what I did. If we consider rugby as he suggests, we include a spare man and we will start going above the 16-seat capacity and we are talking about minibuses with between nine and 16 seats.

There is common interest in this matter throughout the House. Many other countries will have difficulties with parts of the draft directive. I suspect that during the next year or so the Council of Ministers will be finding ways of allowing flexibility, which will be important. If other countries find difficulties when we do not, it is not in our interests to force them to change unnecessarily. They may be trying to protect a position that we may wish to adopt. We may want to learn from their experience. We want to try to bring some of the obvious problems into the open. One of the problems is minibus driver licensing, which is wrong. I hope that there will be unanimity in the House on that, although, sad to day, there was not unanimity in the European Parliament on 14 December when one or two people of other political groups said that the Secretary of State was trying to use deregulation of buses to assist his arguments.

We want to make it plain that commercial operators of minibuses would be required to have their drivers take the public service vehicle test. It is the volunteer drivers who are important and well worth protecting.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Many hon. Members receive letters from many charitable organisations and we are heartened not just by my hon. Friend's view but by his flexibility. Can he give us a genuine and clear understanding that that flexibility will take place in Europe? The charitable organisations that use the minibuses do an enormous amount of good for hundreds of thousands of people.

Mr. Bottomley: I think that the message is getting through. Some developments that Britain has pioneered have been copied by others. For example, the orange badge scheme which allows privileges to people with real mobility difficulties has now been copied. In London the air buses between Heathrow airport and the London railway stations each take two wheelchirs. That sort of integrated service is far better than a specialist service. That is the kind of transport spectrum which many people have developed—*[Interruption.]* That is a sensible expression for those with mobility handicaps. For others we use the word coherent. I am sure that, as the Labour party searches for reality, it will come to adopt that, together with most of the other policies that it is learning from us.

The key point is that we want to try to spread what is good and right. Something that is as good as or better than going by car or not moving at all needs to be protected.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I am sure that the Minister will enjoy the unanimity that he is seeking, but can he give some idea of the extent to which he has discovered, in discussion with his fellow transport Ministers from other Community countries, that the argument that we are advancing is gaining ground?

Mr. Bottomley: It is difficult to be certain. However, if Members of the European Parliament who spoke against the Government's proposals change their minds, that will help. There were one or two who, as reported in the official journal of the European Parliament of 14 December, made it plain that they were not convinced.

I do not want to personalise this matter in any way. I know the difficulties that can arise. I see that my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary is in his place, so I may know more very shortly. However, I am sure that in the last month that Commissioner Clinton Davis was working he tried to clear many issues—and bringing the draft directive into the open was important. Nevertheless, a mistake was made. If he could be man enough to say, "I am sorry. I made a mistake over minibus driving licences", that would make a great difference to the staff within the directorate concerned.

I repeat that I do not want to be personal. When Clinton Davis wrote a rather peculiar letter to me, I turned the other cheek. That may have been a mistake, but it was probably better to go on as I did and to ask him to change his mind and accept the case for safety and mobility, and to join the all-British campaign to maintain the right to drive minibuses on ordinary driving licences—perhaps with the extra assurance of safety that that option will be available only to people with two years' driving experience. That system is one which we think will work for motor bikes of greater power or of larger cubic capacity.

The Commission's proposal is the latest step in Community plans for harmonisation. Discussions began more than 10 years ago, and the first directive was adopted in 1980. It is intended that the latest initiative will complete the harmonisation process.

Conformity of licensing systems is generally welcomed. It is good news for drivers—especially those of lorries and buses—who go abroad, as common format licences will be recognised immediately in all member states. The introduction of a single licence showing all driving entitlement offers opportunities for streamlining the existing system to provide a quicker and cheaper service. This should not be achieved at the cost of existing safety standards or of the mobility of sections of the population. A number of serious issues must be resolved before we can agree to the latest proposals.

The Commission's proposals are supposed to replace and enlarge upon the 1980 directive. There is a long way to go before their adoption. The proposals will need to be discussed in a European Council working group, and negotiations are likely to take many months—I suspect that that means one year or more—to complete.

Widespread consultations are in progress. The Department is consulting about 800 individuals and bodies. There are three major areas of concern. One is the indefinite recognition of licences issued in other member states. That will cause problems for the driver record, because a category of drivers would be unrecorded. It would cause problems also for the fixed penalty system, because there is no provision for recording endorsements on licences issued in other member states. It would cause problems for the courts, because they have no jurisdiction to endorse licences issued by other member states.

I ought to share with the House the information that a number of other member countries are to examine our system of penalty points and endorsements, because it offers a flexibility that others might welcome.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Italy imposes an age limit of 60 on the drivers of commercial buses and lorries. Will the Minister advise the House if in future negotiations it is attempted to impose such a limit on British drivers?

Mr. Bottomley: The Department must be open with the House because here and in industry—among unions and employers alike—there is a common interest in working out what makes sense. It is a question of deciding what is right and then ascertaining whether such is possible. I shall certainly be open with the House, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Meale: The Minister is surely aware that a number of commercial vehicle drivers are aged over 60 and are intending to retire at 65. He must be aware also that a number of the people who offer their services as drivers to voluntary groups are also aged over 60.

Mr. Bottomley: Without saying that our system is the best in all respects, we try to judge people by their medical condition rather than just by their age. People are different from racehorses.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) for agreeing with me. In him we see the new shadow Cabinet spokesman whom we recognised last Friday. I should not say too much about racehorses, having read *The Guardian* on Sunday and discovered that none of its tipsters put the Grand National winner in the top four.

The specification of details of conditions attached to drivers with a disability on the licence causes another problem. It is incompatible with the "until aged 70" licensing which we have, because vehicles, adaptations and prostheses are likely to change several times over the life of a licence holder. The proposal would be hurtful to disabled people because their disability will be printed on the licence. It will be difficult to fit the details on computer licences because limited space is available. Of those reasons, I regard the third as the least important and the first two as very important.

As I have said, there is a problem with the treatment of drivers of minibuses and light goods vehicles. The directive would be disastrous for the voluntary and community transport systems, because volunteers would not come forward if a second test and higher medical standards were required. Dr. Barnardos estimated that it would lose five out of six volunteer drivers with this sort of system. Those who suggest that it is up to Government to pay the cost of extra tests do not understand how the volunteer system works.

The proposal for the treatment of drivers of minibuses and light goods vehicles is unjustified on road safety grounds because statistics show that travelling in minibuses is safer than travelling in cars. If adopted, the

proposal would be a missed opportunity for other member states, who could enjoy the benefits of our system. Other points may arise in the light of the consultation exercise.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Judging from comments tonight and previous discussions in the House on this issue, it appears that the House is behind the Minister in his battles with the European Community. Will he comment on the fact that this matter will be taken under majority voting by the European Community under article 100A? Therefore, of much more importance is whether he has the support of the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Bottomley: We have not yet reached that stage. I shall share with the House a letter which I have received from Commissioner Karel van Miert, who has taken over as the transport Commissioner. He said that he was much impressed by our case for

"still more sympathetic consideration in the provision of transport services and of the difficulties which may be experienced by people with restricted mobility".

That goes slightly beyond the strict charity definition. The Commissioner said that he attached

"great importance to this issue and would like the Commission to play an active role in this area."

It seems as though we are regaining some of the ground that should never have been lost. The Commissioner said that he will accept our suggestion to have this important matter discussed—starting with discussions between officials, and then between the Commissioner and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or me. That shows that there is an appreciation of our initiatives on mobility and safety.

If the rest of the European Community had our road safety record, 40 per cent. fewer people would have died last year. We lead the Community in road casualty reduction and in mobility for those with special needs.

The United Kingdom is generally able to comply with the directive, without major changes to existing arrangements. The draft directive offers the opportunity to consider changes in tests, other than those required by it, and we shall consider our tests generally in the light of consultations on the directive which are now in progress.

The basic concept of staging of entitlement for driving lorries, passenger vehicles and trailers is acceptable in principle, but individual cases will need to be considered very carefully. We look forward to the results of the consultation, in which we hope people will participate. In some cases, experience criteria will be preferable to extra tests. We made that compromise on minibuses and it may also apply to motor cycles of more than 400 cc or more than 35 kW in power.

We agree with the Commission's proposal to limit the size or power of bikes which inexperienced motor cyclists may ride. Considerations of the detailed proposal—whether it should be a cubic capacity or a power limit—are still being considered, and we have an open mind on that.

We do not accept the need for a separate test before motor cyclists may ride large machines, although I am prepared to continue to give consideration to the motor cyclist who passes the test and then wishes to move on to a larger machine. It may be appropriate to allow the option of an extra test. We shall argue for two years' experience after passing the old motor cycle test before allowing a motor cyclist to ride larger and more powerful machines.

The Government aim to get the Commission to accept changes that maintain an incentive for drivers to exchange licences issued elsewhere for the United Kingdom version if they are to spend some time in this country. We want to allow descriptions of disabilities on licences and details of prostheses to be in a generalised form compatible with long-period licensing. We want the Commission to allow minibuses and light goods vehicles to continue to be driven on an ordinary car entitlement without a second test or higher medical standards. We are not trying to ease the qualifications for commercial bus drivers, which may have been one of the misunderstandings that occurred in December.

There are some signs that the Commission is willing to listen to our arguments. We will need to work with other member states, many of which have similar if not identical concerns, in discussions in the Council working group. In the meantime, it is necessary to press ahead with existing commitments under the first directive.

The Road Traffic (Driving Licensing and Information Systems) Bill will come before the House for Second Reading on Thursday. It will be essential to meet existing commitments, particularly the integration of ordinary and vocational licences to show all entitlements on a single licence. This will be an advantage to professional and vocational drivers. The change will involve a major transformation of both systems. The transfer of vocational licensing to the DVLC will lead to a quicker and cheaper service for lorry and bus drivers as well as improvements to the service for ordinary drivers.

It is sensible to facilitate the adoption of the best features of the Commission's latest proposals, and we are doing that. I assure the House that the Bill that we shall consider on Thursday does not facilitate the introduction of the proposals that are of concern, especially those on minibuses. It does not sell the pass on these issues; it is drafted on the assumption that our present arrangements will continue. If we are unsuccessful in Brussels—and I do not expect to be—and have to adopt any of the proposals, we will have to return to Parliament before we implement further changes.

I am grateful for hon. Members' support and I hope that we can spread it so that it becomes universal among our representation in Europe, and I hope that we can get a little change from the Commissioner emeritus, which would make it much easier for the Commission to accept a sensible change that would maintain and enhance safety and mobility.

12.7 am

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): This is a short but by no means unimportant or insignificant debate.

The document that we are discussing must be set in the context of the European Commission's efforts to ensure the removal of all obstacles to the free movement of people. As I understand it, we are already at the first stage of that process—a halfway house requiring member states to adopt a common format for the licence, to harmonise their categories of licence and to provide common standards of competence and fitness to drive.

As the Minister said, part of the Road Traffic (Driver Licensing and Information Systems) Bill arises from the

[Ms. Joan Ruddock]

first directive. Hon. Members will be relieved to hear that I shall keep my remarks on those aspects of the directive brief in anticipation of Thursday's debate.

We believe that our overriding aim should be the improvement of road safety. It would be disastrous to introduce legislative change simply to save money or for administrative convenience. In other circumstances, we have encountered the contradictory pulls of safety requirements and pressure to cut costs and save money. It is clear that cost-cutting should not be a priority in developing a safe and comprehensive driver licensing system.

We note that the Government's consultative document on the unified driving licence estimates that the effect of centralising the licence issuing system will be the loss of 100 jobs and savings of up to £1 million a year. Will the Minister give more detail on where the job losses will be? Will he take the opportunity to increase staff at Swansea to reduce delays in obtaining licences, especially passenger service vehicle and heavy goods vehicle licences? Will he give the House the assurance that the reorganisation of licence issuing will not be used as an excuse for a cost-cutting exercise?

I turn now to the document under discussion, which, as the Minister said, is still subject to negotiation with other member states. The document falls into a number of sections. The basic proposal is that member states should introduce a national driving licence which would be mutually recognised in all member countries. On the face of it, that seems to make sense, and would relieve a foreign national of the need to exchange his or her national licence for a UK licence when resident in this country. However, we foresee, as the Minister has described, problems for the penalty and endorsement system, as no court in one country can award penalty points or endorse a driving licence issued in another country.

The Minister has informed the House tonight that the Government are pressing for licence holders from other member states living in Britain still to be required to obtain a British licence, and in general we support that position.

That brings me to the question of driving standards. Members of the Transport and General Workers Union have expressed their concern to me about the possible deterioration of driving standards if a unified drivers' licence with mutual recognition is adopted. In order to prevent such a deterioration it will be necessary to harmonise testing throughout the Community and that testing will need to be to the highest standards. The document we are considering does lay down minimum requirements for drivers' tests, which will mean that in this country, for example, we will have to include a parking test and more theory.

No doubt in some countries the minimum standards proposed will result in an improvement in driver testing, but we believe that there are problems for us. First, the judgment used in passing or failing applicants will vary from country to country, so a standard of driving which may pass in one country may fail in another. Secondly, we need an assurance that these standards will be implemented as quickly as possible so that any discrepancies in the testing requirements are ironed out. Perhaps the Minister would comment further on these points in his response.

Harmonisation in licensing also encompasses the reclassification of vehicles and the entitlement to drive, and of course, as the Minister has said, it is this aspect of the document which has generated most controversy, with its proposed new category of vehicles with nine to 16 passenger seats or between 3·5 and 7·5 tonnes in weight. Drivers in this category will have to have not just the car licence, as at present, but a second driving test, and be subject to more rigorous medical conditions than for the standard licence.

We sympathise very much with those voluntary organisations who are alarmed at these proposals. Their drivers at present, of course, because they do not drive for hire or reward, are able to drive minibuses on ordinary car licences. We recognise, as does the Minister, that the use of minibuses by community groups is particularly widespread in Britain. Some of the organisations in my constituency which would be affected by these proposals have been in contact with me. Age Concern, Lewisham Association for People with Disabilities, the Lewisham Indo-Chinese Community and Pensioners' Link are all organisations that I know well. I know how well they serve our community. The position is unique in Britain, as has been said already tonight, for the extent of innovative and accessible transport schemes which these organisations facilitate. Many of these minibus drivers are women who gain a great deal of confidence and satisfaction from this voluntary work.

Community transport groups are rightly concerned that many voluntary drivers will be deterred from driving by the prospect of a more stringent test. The organisations themselves will be hard pressed to pay for the necessary training. Many of those organisations—and I must say this to the Government—are filling a gap left by Government underfunding in many cases, left by the deterioration in social service provision and, in rural areas in particular, by the collapse of public transport. These groups are already very short of money, and with the continuing squeeze on local authority finance most of these organisations——

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Is the hon. Lady aware that in many rural areas of Cornwall the number of bus services has increased as a result of deregulation? I agree with her that the voluntary sector provides a valuable additional service. If voluntary organisations were unable to provide that service, it would be a terrible blow to rural communities.

Ms. Ruddock: I understand that an examination of the provision of bus services in Cornwall showed that there had been a reduction in mileage.

I repeat that many of the community services are under pressure and are being called upon because of the reductions in public service transport. There is little prospect that the voluntary organisations, given their difficulties, will be able to find the money for extensive training.

The Minister said that we would not demonstrate understanding of the problem if we sought tonight to obtain a commitment from him simply to pay, but should the Minister be unsuccessful in his negotiations, and should additional training and testing of volunteer drivers be necessary, the Minister must give a commitment that

voluntary groups will not be faced with the additional cost and that local authorities will not be expected to pick up the bill.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There has been no suggestion on either side of the House that it would be acceptable to impose a secondary statutory test. Even if the Government paid for all the additional testing, there would be fewer drivers, fewer voluntary minibuses and more people opting for cars, involving greater risk. In addition, more people would have to stay at home. They would lose their mobility. One part of Commissioner Emeritus's letter ought to be buried and never disinterred. Additional statutory testing of minibus drivers in the voluntary sector is not needed.

Ms. Ruddock: I am prepared to agree with the Minister, but he is not infallible. It will be a majority decision. We cannot be certain of the result.

We believe that safety should come first. The Minister began by quoting the relevant safety statistics for the minibus and the car. I believe that minibuses do not have as good a safety record as other forms of public transport. They are not as safe as public transport buses. I hope that the Minister will say that he supports greater efforts to reduce minibus accidents and that he will describe the steps that he intends to take to improve minibus safety if he continues to press for a derogation for voluntary minibus drivers from the new test.

Mr. Bottomley: Passengers in public service buses are more at risk—I suspect because of falls rather than because of crashes and collisions. People in the voluntary sector take great care of their passengers. I pay tribute to the fellow members of my own union who do much of the driving in the public sector and who have been involved in many of the developments in public transport services. I attended a branch meeting of my union this evening. All the time was spent on the dockers' centenary. No mention was made of the dock labour scheme.

Ms. Ruddock: In principle, we are not opposed to stricter medical tests for drivers who are responsible for the safety of other people or who are in charge of larger vehicles. However, the document specifies certain conditions, such as diabetes. That seems to preclude drivers from holding a passenger vehicle licence if they suffer from that condition. I am no expert in such matters, but it seems unnecessarily restrictive, and I would urge that medical conditions should not be specified in that way but should be left to professional opinion as to whether they constitute a safety risk for a particular individual. Perhaps the Minister will explain his understanding of that provision.

I shall comment briefly on two further aspects of the document—the proposals for motor cycles and the new requirements for people with disabilities. I am sure that the Minister and I share a deep concern about the accident statistics for motor cycles. As I frequently travel along the Old Kent road in heavy traffic, all too often I see how motorbike accidents occur. Furthermore, research by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory shows that the number of fatalities is higher on big machines than on smaller bikes. The Commission's proposal to introduce a test for 400 cc bikes and above appears attractive. Yet the same motor bike organisations which are supporting compulsory training as proposed in the Road Traffic Bill are opposed to the new test. It would be helpful if the Minister could provide a little more detail about any consultation he has had on what he outlined as a compromise of passing the ordinary test and proceeding to ride a bigger vehicle on the basis of two years' experience.

Finally, I shall make a few comments about the proposal that people with disabilities would need to display on their licences any vehicle modifications or details of any artificial prostheses that they wear. I reinforce the Minister's point that that is a particularly offensive proposal. Any change in vehicle, vehicle technology or physical condition would have to be recorded, increasing the administrative burden. For that reason, I understand that the DVLC in Swansea is opposed to the proposal. How would it be enforced? Would people be stopped to check whether they have an artificial limb? Clearly it is nonsense. Why should disabled people be singled out in that way?

The Greater London Association for the Disabled opposes the measure because

> "It is personally intrusive and demeaning for drivers to be required to make public that sort of information on a document which is often used for identification and other general purposes".

I wholeheartedly agree. I support the Government in this matter, and, on what is perhaps an unusual occasion, in general we support the Government on the EC document.

12.32 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I welcome the Government's objective to obtain satisfactory amendments to cover drivers of non-commercial and light goods vehicles. The EC proposal contains one of the most damaging spin-offs of European proposals for some time. The rigorous tests for voluntary drivers and the stringent medical requirements that would be required by the measure would have a devastating effect on the numbers of volunteers. At present, we rely on thousands of volunteers who are prepared to give up their time to drive minibuses for organisations and who would take a completely different view if they had to undergo difficult tests and medical inspections at frequent intervals.

I do not believe that the European Commission has taken into account the scale of this sector in the United Kingdom. There are 85,000 minibuses in Great Britain, which is way above the number to be found in other countries. Community transport in Britain alone makes some 10 million passenger journeys each year and 48 per cent. of all minibuses in Britain are used by voluntary organisations and private individuals. Without those voluntary services thousands of elderly and disabled people could become housebound, and many more would be denied their only chance to take part in recreational and sporting activities, to travel outside their homes and to take a holiday. Many thousands of organisations are totally dependent on the use of minibuses with voluntary drivers to transport their members to and from club activities, on outings and on holidays.

It may be helpful if I cite a few examples from my own constituency of organisations which rely on voluntary drivers. The Gravesend and Northfleet day centres, for instance, are local branches of Age Concern, which has thousands of branches up and down the country. Every day, buses collect old people from their homes and take them to the centres. Many of the drivers are retired, and in all cases they are volunteers. In my constituency there is

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also the Meopham community bus, again driven by volunteers, half of whom are retired. They take local people shopping and link villages not served by scheduled buses. They also provide services to the old people's clubs in the area. Other examples of organisations which rely on voluntary drivers are the Helen Allison school, which serves autistic children, numerous parent-teacher associations, scout groups, Mencap, Cheshire homes and PHAB —Physically Handicapped and Able-bodied groups.

Who brought forward this extraordinary proposal? It was the then Transport Commissioner—a certain Stanley Clinton Davis, a former and unlamented Labour Member of this House. Mr. Clinton Davis was sent to Brussels, where he promptly went native and has since tried to regulate and regiment everyone from "Ballywhatnot" in the west to the Bosphorus in the east. I found in the Library a quite extraordinary letter from that former Commissioner to my hon. Friend the Minister. It certainly takes some reading. It accuses my hon. Friend of lobbying against these proposals, as though it were a disgraceful thing to lobby and to try to apply democratic pressure on behalf of people in this country. The former Commissioner went on to complain about the kind of people with whom the Minister was lobbying—the Mobility Alliance, an organisation bringing together the Community Transport Association, Help the Aged, Barnardo's, London Community Transport Association, the Lord's Taverners, the Variety Club, the National Union of Students and Youth Clubs (UK). These are all good organisations heavily dependent on minibuses with voluntary drivers, but it seems that they are all extremely suspect to Commissioner Emeritus Clinton Davis, who notes darkly in his extraordinary letter:

"The Mobility Alliance is enjoying the active support of your Department."

His reference to "Mrs. Thatcher's Government" seems to imply some form of guilt by association. In his letter to my hon. Friend the Minister he also complains:

"Any change of these proposals would be dangerous because they merely represent a road safety measure."

We heard this evening from the Minister exactly how safe our minibuses are by comparison. It may be of interest to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) if I refer to the recent Transport and Road Research Laboratory study, which found the accident rate for minibuses to be no higher than for cars and—this is of considerable significance—far lower than for buses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In this matter I have tried to be scrupulously fair, which is why I have not joined in the Clinton Davis bashing. He is a Right-wing Socialist and I am a Left-wing Tory, so perhaps we ought to be working together. The point about the bus statistics is that in general buses are working in inner city areas, where the crash rate is higher, whereas other vehicles tend to get out on to the motorways and other roads which are inherently safer. In dealing with the point that the hon. Lady raised, however, my hon. Friend is correct in saying that, overall, passengers in minibuses are safer than passengers using almost any other form of transport.

Mr. Arnold: I thank my hon. Friend for emphasising the point about safety, and I admire his restraint in not responding in kind to the letter from Commissioner Clinton Davis. The best that one can say of the Commissioner's proposals is that they are bland and have not been thought through. The kindest interpretation is that this is a well-meaning measure that he intended to be his epitaph. It would perhaps be less kind to regard his letter, in particular, as making cheap party political points which I regret to say were echoed by the hon. Member for Deptford.

What we need to do now is to convince the new Commissioner to think the whole issue through again, and I call on my hon. Friend the Minister to get together with him and sort the whole thing out.

12.39 am

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): The EC document refers to the licences for drivers of European countries and the exchange of those licences, which is necessary as it will not only produce a common standard of driving, but will reduce bureaucracy. The standards of testing, however, should be the same throughout the Community because safety is vital.

The discrimination mentioned in the document regarding physically handicapped people and the testing of them is unfortunate and must be considered. Mobility for the physically handicapped is an important asset as it enables them to get round, to participate in the community and, therefore, to live a much more normal life.

The most important part of the document relates to minibuses. In many parts of Britain, particularly in rural areas, public transport is non-existent. In the past 10 years the Government have contributed to the abolition of public transport in many areas.

Half the 85,000 minibuses that operate in our communities are driven by volunteers. Such minibuses are vital to my community, to that represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and to other rural areas. Given the dependence on volunteer drivers in remote rural areas, it is unrealistic to say that such drivers must be tested unless they carry nine or fewer passengers.

In Brecon we have a disabled club which has 600 members. That club is served by six buses and they must cover a wide rural area. The elderly are brought to local towns once a week and the disabled are taken to centres and hospitals. Those people would be unable to live a civilised life without the service provided by the minibuses. Many small communities in my constituency now operate their own minibuses and they provide a flexible form of transport for people to visit market towns, their doctors and other essential destinations. Since the loss of support from the Manpower Services Commission, volunteers now play a much more important part in the operation of minibus services.

Before I entered the House I was a lecturer at an agricultural college, which had six minibuses. All the lecturers, myself included, used to drive students round the country to visit farms, factories, creameries and so on. We worked flexible hours and the students would have been denied the benefits derived from those visits if we had been unable to drive them. It is important to note that not too many restrictions were imposed on us. Other colleges, especially those that teach technical subjects, depend on their minibuses to get their students about. The issue of private contractors is not as simple as some hon. Members have suggested. In some cases part-time drivers assist

contractors in the evening to take out local people when there is a demand. That is a particular feature of remote rural areas.

I agree with the Minister about minibus services that assist the elderly and the disabled. Without such services and volunteer drivers, such people would be trapped. They would be unable to go shopping or to enjoy a day out. The mentally disabled would not be taken to places where they can enjoy themselves. This form of transport also enables children to visit the seaside and sports clubs to engage in competitive sports.

Post buses are important in remote areas, and I am not clear about the position of PSV licences and post bus drivers, many of whom drive royal mail vans. In the highlands and mid-Wales, the post buses run important services. Many of them are minibuses and are designed as such.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that this debate provides the Minister with an opportunity to reflect on the extent to which post buses could help to compensate rural communities which are experiencing the downgrading or loss of local post offices? A mobile provision in such areas of the facilities to which my hon. Friend is referring could be of considerable help.

Mr. Livsey: That is right, and the post bus is a flexible tool in providing services to extremely remote areas. The concept could be developed further.

I hope that the points that hon. Members have made will be heeded by the Commission and that it will amend the instrument accordingly. The Government must press the issue hard at that level, and the Minister will appreciate that he has the support of Members in all parts of the House in that endeavour.

12.47 am

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): The House is unanimous in stressing that the proposals are not satisfactory. I do not like retrospective legislation of any kind. Since gaining a driving licence at the age of 17, I have driven most categories of vehicles that that licence entitles me to drive, including minibuses and medium-sized goods vehicles of up to 7·5 tonnes gross vehicle weight.

Because of the peculiarities of British driving legislation, we have become one of the foremost producers of the 7·5 tonne truck, with the Ford Iveco cargo range and the Leyland Daf Roadrunner range, which are pre-eminent in this country. We export them in significant numbers throughout Europe because of the high demand for that type of vehicle, which a driver may drive on his normal driving licence and without having to take a special test.

I support what has been said, not just about minibuses but about the impact that this legislation may have on British manufacturers of minibuses and other commercial vehicles which hitherto we have been entitled to drive on our normal driving licences.

There will be a significant effect on the number of people entitled to drive minibuses if everyone must re-sit the driving test to enable them to drive that type of vehicle. The list of requirements in the instrument to enable one to drive a minibus is awesome indeed. For example, paragraph 5(2) on page 27 states:

"Drivers of vehicles in these categories must demonstrate a knowledge and sound understanding of the fields set out below".

There follow a number of subjects in which the would-be driver must be knowledgeable, whether or not the vehicle is equipped with the items involved. If one wants to drive a Freight Rover Sherpa van or a Ford Transit minibus, one must know about the effect of wind on the course of the vehicle, rules on vehicle weights and dimensions, driving hours, rest periods and use of tachographs, the principles of braking systems and speed governors. We are talking about the driver of a minibus. He must also know about precautions to be taken when overtaking because of the dangers of splashing spray or mud. He must know how to read a road map and be capable of checking power-assisted braking and steering systems, which are unlikely to be found on such vehicles. He must know how to use various braking systems and a speed governor, which may be fitted but is unlikely to be.

If category D of the driving test has to be taken before a person may drive a minibus, much new information will be needed by the applicant before he can take the driving test. That alone makes nonsense of that category. The heading "Knowledge" on page 22 is rather intriguing because paragraph 2.2 demands that the applicant for a driving test must have a knowledge of

"mechanical aspects with a bearing on road safety; in particular they must be sufficiently familiar with, and be able to put right, the most common faults in the steering system, tyres, lights and direction indicators, reflectors, rear-view mirrors, windscreen washers and wipers, the exhaust system and seat-belts;".

One's mind can run amok on this. What about replacing king pins on the front steering arms of a vehicle? Perhaps one's wife could do it because her licence indicates that she is able to do it. That is nonsense if for no other reason than it is hopelessly impractical to expect any normal person seeking a driving licence to be able to put those items right. Common sense should tell people that something is wrong, but it is nonsense to expect them to have to put matters right. I suggest that something has gone wrong in the translation of the document because I cannot believe that what it says is correct.

We understand that in the new arrangements the theory part of the driving test will be much more elaborate than that which we are used to in the United Kingdom. Generally, the principle has been for the person being tested to pull up by the side of the road and be asked three or four questions by the examiner on the "Highway Code". I am not sure about the present procedure, but I doubt whether it is any different from what I have suggested.

The proposals suggest that the theory test will be more elaborate than that. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will say whether he intends this to be a written examination to be taken before a practical driving test. The number of items on which people will be tested on theory precludes the side-of-the-road verbal test arrangement that has been the hallmark of the British driving test for as long as it has been taking place.

Perhaps the Minister will tell us whether we are to move towards a theoretical element in the driving test. I would not object to such a test because a case can be made for more emphasis on theory. If that means a written test, I would not argue against it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the light of the directive it is sensible to review what we do. It is important to realise

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that any theoretical examination of the driving test in this and other countries shows that we have the simplest driving testing system and that it leads to the safest driving. We should try to avoid having a sort of GCSE in driving. We want people to be able to negotiate the streets without hitting other people and injuring themselves or others.

Mr. King: I entirely agree. Experience shows that we have produced above-average drivers. Our good record on accidents—high and unacceptable as it is—seems to establish Britain as capable of training and testing its drivers to a high standard. There are grounds for suggesting that we can sub-categorise some of the categories for driving tests and that we can continue with the present arrangements for at least five years at which time the Commission will probably have the right to look again at whether we should all come together in a common cause throughout the European Community.

So things may not be as black as they are painted. But this is very much the thin end of the wedge and I support what my hon. Friend has said, and more power to his elbow in ensuring that we get a sensible result from what at the moment is a rather impracticable solution.

12.55 am

Mr. Garry Waller (Keighley): As many hon. Members have already said, our standards in this country are high and our casualty rate, although far too high still, is lower than that of other European countries. I believe that our approach, certainly as set out by my hon. Friend the Minister, is that we should not be prepared to compromise our standards in any way. I am delighted that he adopts considerable rigour in fighting our corner over the issue of minibuses and I give him my full support. I do not think there is any need for me to say any more about it because my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and other hon. Members have spoken at some length on the subject.

There is concern in this country about the issue of interchangeability of the driving licence. I think that many people feel that it might be possible for an individual to escape the consequences of bad driving in the United Kingdom, or anywhere else for that matter, by obtaining a driving licence elsewhere in the Community, perhaps in that member state where obtaining a licence is easiest, and using it permanently here. I am sure that our approach must be that our standards must be maintained, and because we have this system of penalty points and endorsements there may be difficulties in moving towards harmonisation. In doing so we must be prepared to say that our standards are those to which others should aspire, and we should not be prepared to lower ours.

I want to say a few words about the proposals relating to motor cycles because it is in that respect that the directive seems to be particularly half-baked. Let me remind the House of what is proposed.

The proposals are, first, the creation of a separate licence for motor cycles over 400 cc—a level which can also be equated in terms of engine power—not to be granted until the applicant has held a licence for motor cycles under 400 cc for two years; secondly, the creation of a separate test for such a licence; and, thirdly, the requirement that all tests for a motor cycle licence should be taken on a motor cycle of a capacity of the class of motor cycle that the applicant will become entitled to ride by virtue of obtaining that licence.

The distinction between motor cycles under 400 cc and those over 400 cc is really not justified. The statement which the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) made about the higher casualty rate among riders of large motor cycles was a little simplistic. The situation is much more complex than she suggested. I do not believe that there is strong evidence that there is a higher casualty rate among riders of cycles over 400 cc. There may be a higher casualty rate for riders of motor cycles over, say, 125 cc, but it is much more complex when one comes to a higher figure.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is the earliest weeks and months of motorcycling that are the most dangerous and therefore the greatest risk is on lower powered machines. Our licensing system takes account of that. Once people get to a certain age and maturity, the safety improves, which is why a hell's angel of my sort of age is much safer on a 600 cc bike than someone 20 years younger on a lower powered machine. But I believe there is something in what both my hon. Friend and the hon. Lady are saying.

Mr. Waller: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. That is why I am so worried about the proposal. It seems to me that introducing the extra tier will constitute a diversion of funding and resources from the training and testing of all motor cyclists during the vital period of their first six months on the road. That should be where we concentrate our effort rather than on moving towards an extra tier. By moving towards an extra higher tier, and requiring those who have already qualified to ride motor cycles of 125 cc or more to pass another test later in their motor cycling career, when they are less dangerous, is bound to damage what should be our primary objective.

Considerable evidence was provided in this country for the Transport and Road Research Laboratory by Broughton last year, in West Germany by Koch in 1987 and in Denmark by Carstensen also in 1987, which failed to find any correlation between machine size and accident involvement. So we should be careful before we plump for the kind of proposals which the Commission has adopted, which seem to be based on evidence what is at the very least dubious.

The other practical aspect on which I should like to concentrate is the requirement which appears in the draft directive to take a test on a strange higher capacity machine to gain the qualification to ride it. That seems to be based on the system for learning to ride motor cycles in other countries. Most other member states do not grant provisional driving licences for motor cycles or other vehicles. They have only a single system of a full driving licence. People in member states with such regimes prepare for the full driving licence by completing a specified number of hours' instruction with an authorised driving school. Then they take a driving test; if they pass, a full licence is granted to them. Some people may feel that that system is better than ours, but it appears from the evidence that there is quite a lot to commend our system.

It is notable that, except when undergoing tuition with a driving school, persons may not drive on the road prior to being granted a full driving licence. The Commission's proposals relating to motor cycle testing are suited to what might be described as the driving school regime, where

people possibly hire machines. The provisions are not suited to the British position where a rider takes a test on his own machine, after an introductory off-road session.

The proposals in the draft directive may be counter-productive. The combination of on-road experience and instructor tuition on the rider's own machine has been shown to be more beneficial than off-road testing on a strange machine. The latter often becomes little more than coaching to pass a test. It seems crazy to expect someone to hire a motor cycle to pass a test before he acquiries his own machine. The alternative system does not seem to be suited to the way in which we conduct training and testing. I hope that my hon. Friend will press for the Commission to reconsider that proposal and take account of our system.

I should like my hon. Friend to answer another question. The consultation paper circulated by his Department on 17 March contained under its description of article 4 the following wording:

"Sub-categories for motorcyclists not exceeding 400 ccs, exceeding 400 ccs and light motorcycles not exceeding 125 ccs may be provided."

There seems to be some confusion. It is not clear whether that is a mandatory or discretionary proposal. In some translations the word "may" is replaced by the word "shall". In the most recent versions the word "shall" predominates.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am not sure whether that is certain. We want to opt for "may". If there is this power or cubic capacity limitation, experience generates a greater degree of safety and that would be more suitable and preferable to requiring more motor cyclists to take another test.

Mr. Waller: I am glad to learn that my hon. Friend the Minister is in favour of a discretionary provision, and I would entirely support that. It would be right for us to adopt our procedure which may differ from that in other countries. I hope that that matter will be clarified, and if there is any doubt I trust that my hon. Friend will press for the directive to take account of what we do in this country.

I support my hon. Friend the Minister's general approach to this matter. We can be proud of the practical steps that we have taken to reduce road casualties, although there is still an enormous amount to be done. We should be willing to consider trading up where necessary if other countries do things that are worthy of consideration. However, we should absolutely refuse to trade down merely for the sake of unnecessary harmonisation if that involves sacrificing road safety in this country.

1.5 am

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on bringing this measure to the House at an early date to obtain the views of hon. Members. On this occasion it is the unanimous view of hon. Members that the directive should be seriously amended before it is brought before the Council of Ministers for decision. I support my hon. Friend the Minister, as have all other hon. Members, in his stand on minibuses. The directive clearly fails the test of safety because travelling in motor cars, the obvious alternative in the voluntary sector, would be more dangerous. It also fails the test of practicability.

I want to suggest a way in which my hon. Friend the Minister should approach the matter so that he does not need the derogation to which the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) referred. Article 100A applies to measures designed to create a single market. Therefore, we need not become involved in licensing minibuses which do not cross frontiers or take part in trade between nations in the European Community. It cannot be necessary to harmonise those licences to create a single market.

I venture to suggest that the same applies to the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) about motor cycles. Generally speaking, they are not part of the trading system between nations. There seems to be very little reason why there should be a harmonised basis for motor cycle licensing.

When the Minister argues these matters in Brussels, we should opt for local and country variations to remain and not be interfered with by the directive. In that way the directive could be made much simpler and we could rely on the testing and licensing method of each country and only legislate a European point of view from when matters affect cross-border trade, as was envisaged by the creation of the power in article 100A to make legislation for creating a single market.

1.8 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I am very grateful for the support of the House. I suspect that the House will be returning to these issues not simply on Thursday when we debate a dissociated Bill, but as we move forward in our discussions in the European Parliament which has not entirely disposed of these matters. I hope that in its plenary session the European Parliament will find a way to declare that it will support only measures that maintain or enhance safety and mobility. Its consideration of the draft directive and its advice will then be more welcome than if it were simply the people of Europe who were speaking.

The general conformity of licensing is welcome. In a way this kind of debate tends to focus on areas of disagreement. It is like some of the meetings of the Council of Ministers where people come together to disagree instead of explicitly saying that there are gains. In this measure there are gains for those with vocational licences where the ease of recognition and showing what qualifications have been obtained are important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) made some important points. I welcome his support, particularly on minibuses. We would not want to take forward his suggestion if we could avoid it because we want conformity and recognition.

Let me build on the point that my hon. Friend was making that within the aim of conformity we should have some flexibility and respect for the traditions of each country. Britain will not unnecessarily try to force other countries to give up what works for them if we think that it provides a reasonable standard of protection for other member countries. That is the principle that should increasingly be adopted.

I am encouraged by Commissioner Karel van Miert who will want to bring together the expertise within the EC to try to work together on matters which do not necessarily require legislation but which can improve safety and mobility. I take great comfort from the fact that in 1987 we had the lowest number of road casualties for 34

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years. In the two or three years before that there was no change in law. It was a new awareness that made the big difference. That is one way forward in Europe as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) talked about the casualty rate, which is unacceptably high. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set a target of reducing the number of those killed or seriously injured by one third by the year 2000. He will shortly be announcing the figures for 1988, which will be of interest to the House. My hon. Friend is right to point to the fact that it is the results that matter, not the theory of what in an ideal world the provisions would amount to. What will happen on the road? Will more people be killed? Will fewer people be injured ? Can more people move around? Those are the issues that really matter. My hon. Friend made that point clearly in relation to motor cycles.

I welcome the alliance of motor cycle interests that we have created on training. That will be of enormous value. We are beginning to create a culture among motor cyclists which will transfer the experience and the defensive riding techniques of the mature motor cyclist more often and faster to the younger motor cyclist who is so dramatically at risk.

I said at the beginning that to travel a mile or a kilometre by motor-cycle is 65 times more dangerous than travelling as a passenger in a minibus. That illustrates the extent of the problem. As my hon. Friend said, whatever is right or wrong on the 400 cc motor bike, or whatever it may be, whether it is a "may" or a "shall"—he appeared to lean more toward "shall" but we shall argue for the "may"—it is for the smaller machine for the younger cyclist that we must make the change.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) is an expert in most motoring interests. I am delighted that the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders has agreed to a meeting where we could take the manufacturers' interests into Europe. Most people in mainland Europe cannot understand that we have 85,000 minibuses in Britain, of which 60,000 to 70,000 are non-commercial minibuses in the voluntary sector. They cannot understand that we have 11,000 minibuses with lifts to take wheelchairs. That is incomprehensible to other countries. If the system as negotiated by Commissioner Emeritus Clinton Davis allowed the development of the voluntary minibus sector, there would be minibuses throughout Europe for scout groups, organisations for the elderly or students and people who want to go on a pub crawl while the driver stays on the wagon. That would be common throughout Europe, but it is not, because the regime that has been suggested does not work. People would be condemned to stay at home or use cars and neither is desirable.

My hon. Friend also spoke of the Mobility Alliance. It is important for the Government to go on working with the voluntary sector. One thing that we have learnt from local government is that it is possible to work with the voluntary sector to help it. Many county councils have done that. They have said that they do not need a monopoly of the public bus service but want to try to achieve a spectrum of provision to come together and make possible more mobility for those around them.

I pay tribute to the training schemes that many voluntary organisations run. No one should believe that most of the major voluntary organisations take people off the street, give them a key to a minibus and ask them to drive 14 people around one weekend a month. Many voluntary organisations provide very professional training schemes and reassure themselves that their drivers know how to cope with their passengers, their vehicle, and the traffic.

Commissioner Clinton Davis remarked that because minibuses are longer—often much longer—than cars, their drivers should be required to take the public service vehicle test. The truth is that a car such as the Peugeot 505 family estate is longer than any minibus capable of carrying 14 people. Also, if a licence holder is permitted to drive a van of certain dimensions without being required to undergo a special driving test, why should he be obliged to do so to drive a minibus on the same wheelbase? That does not make sense, and most people understand that now.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Livsey) spoke of the importance of handicapped people being allowed to drive vehicles, because otherwise they would be condemned not to share in the community. I pay tribute to MAVIS—the mobility advisory centre at Crowthorne in Berkshire—and to the other advice centres serving the handicapped who drive themselves. I pay tribute also to those who established and have kept going Motability, which makes individual driving possible for many people to whom it was denied before. I pay further tribute to Motability's unleaded petrol campaign, which did so much to wake many of us up to the fact that we were unnecessarily pumping lead into the air, which may harm the development of children.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) helped by providing support across the Chamber for what we are trying to achieve. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) spoke specifically about the letter that I sadly received from the ex-Commissioner. On balance, it is probably right of me not to reply to my hon. Friend in detail. The points made by the Commissioner emeritus were wrong. They misinterpreted the Government's intentions and the unity of the Mobility Alliance delegation. Some of the correspondence in *The Guardian* made it plain that Socialist councillors from London boroughs wanted to keep politics out of it, and I go along with that. It is better to sacrifice political advantage and to ensure that we continue representing the interests of those with special needs, whether or not they are handicapped.

The arguments concerning motor cycles revolve on the question of training more than anything else—though engine capacity is also important. I do not go along with all of the interpretations of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley in respect of the Broughton studies. Nevertheless, we can probably work together and reach agreement. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford spoke about moving the administration of vocational licensing from traffic area offices to Swansea. There are about 30 million ordinary licence holders. It is necessary to hold such a licence before one can hold a licence to drive a lorry or bus. There are about 1 million vocational drivers who are PSV or HGV licence holders.

It is sensible to handle that work at Swansea, where ordinary licence details are already held on computer. That should lead to a better and faster service for vocational drivers. It is important to recognise that, as a consequence of shifting that work to Swansea, there will be greater demands made of the staff there and less of the staff

at traffic area offices. It follows naturally that that is the way it goes. I pay tribute to the staff at Swansea, who have lifted their efficiency far higher than most of British industry. Efficiency is the ally of compassion rather than its enemy. We should not judge how good a service is just by the number of staff employed to provide it.

As to general licensing, even under the Commission's draft proposals, existing driver rights will be preserved in respect of medium-size group vehicles and for minibuses used non-commercially.

On the driving test, we and other member states challenged the relevance to safety of including in the proposed syllabus map reading, repairs and other aspects mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield. We do not understand the proposals requiring a move towards a written test. We shall probably have to ask a few more oral questions as part of our current testing arrangements.

The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) asked about the upper age limit for lorry drivers. The Bill that we shall debate on Thursday does not prescribe an upper age limit for lorry drivers. Those aged over 65 will have to renew their licences each year, and produce a medical certificate on renewal. If the directive is adopted, other member states such as Italy—which the hon. Gentleman mentioned—will have to recognise our arrangements. That is a move forward. I do not want to be too diverted by post buses, but if they are used for hire or reward they will need to be driven by someone with a public service vehicle licence. The directive would not change that.

If we can obtain a change of heart from those Members of the European Parliament who fell on the side of Clinton Davis in December—if they acknowledge the safety and mobility points, and that is confirmed by Stanley Clinton Davis—it will be much easier to work with the openness of the new Commissioner, Karel van Miert, and his staff. We could then work out an arrangement that would be satisfactory to the European Parliament, agreed by the Council of Ministers and confirmed by the Commission as leading to better safety and mobility.

These are the points on which we rest our case and I hope that the House will pass the motion as an indication that, throughout the country, we support these aims as we consider the draft directive.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 10357/1/88 on driver licensing; and endorses the Government's objective of negotiating satisfactory amendments with respect to the drivers of non-commercial minibuses and light goods vehicles, drivers from other Member States resident in the United Kingdom, and disabled drivers.

Leeds Urban Development Corporation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

1.21 am

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): When the Government first announced their intention to establish a series of urban development corporations throughout the country, the main reason given was that the areas to be covered by the UDCs would, at that stage, be suffering from a lack of investment and development. That was never the case in Leeds. If there was an argument for a UDC in the Government's own terms in other cities, that has never been and is not now the case for Leeds, which is enjoying probably the most substantial growth of any city outside the south-east. There are those who claim that Leeds, under its Labour-controlled authority, has now become the country's second city, and there are many people in Leeds who would regard it as the first rather than the second city.

When establishing the UDCs, one of the Government's suggestions was that they perceived some animosity between the local authority and the private sector. That has never been the case in Leeds, which is a success city as a result of the partnership which has developed between the Labour-controlled city council and the private sector. That success and partnership have enabled the city council to attract investment and to bring about the rebirth and renaissance of the city centre and much of my constituency.

My first point, which is not necessarily central to this debate but needs to go on record, is that if there was ever any justification for a UDC, it could not be justified in Leeds. Under the previous council leader, councillor Mudie, and now under councillor Tricket, Leeds city council has enjoyed much success, taking it beyond the necessity of establishing a UDC.

The Government's motives and their objectives for the UDC were far more sinister, manipulative and political. The Tories in Leeds know that they have no chance of ever gaining control, but it is essential for Tory patronage, influence and organisation to have some quangos appointed by Government and made up of placemen appointed by Government. That is why a proposal was made for a housing action trust, why we have the task force and why the urban development corporation came about—as part of a much larger agenda to subvert the city council and local democracy. It was a recognition by the Minister of his party's failure to attract votes in local elections in Leeds. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) may find that amusing, but he will not want to make any bets with me about the date when the Conservatives take control of Leeds city council as it will be a long time before that happens.

There was no need for a UDC, but we now have one in Leeds, and we recognise that it has a potential contribution to make. We hope that it will behave in a socially responsible way, and part of its social responsibility is to consult local business and residents and to be part of the city's government in partnership rather than opposition.

The UDC should ensure that its decisions are open to public scrutiny and subject to the maximum involvement

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

of local community organisations and local business. That is crucial because people and business in Leeds have a right to know what is happening.

We are discussing major issues that will affect the future of Leeds and its residents for many years. An example of the importance of its decisions is the possible development by Triple Five, a Canadian organisation that has already held talks with the city council and the UDC. According to a UDC press release, the scheme could be worth more than £3 billion. It is a major investment of such significance that it could change the shape of the south central area of Leeds for many years to come. I am not making a judgment on the scheme, but I am asking that the UDC's involvement in it be open so that the public know what is likely to happen and can comment on the way in which it develops.

Another example is the road scheme for the Richmond hill area of my constituency, which is important for local residents and business. It is important that when the UDC, as the planning authority for the area, puts forward proposals for the development of the road scheme it recognises the legitimate interests of local residents, who have a right to know what the UDC intends. Nobody in the area affected by the UDC's proposals is yet aware of them. I am aware of them because information has begun to be leaked that the UDC is thinking of building a road down East street—on stilts at points—which is probably the worst environmental scheme that could be conceived for the area. There has been no consultation or discussion with local residents. That is not the way in which the Minister would go about his business; it is not the way that the UDC should go about its business.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): If one considers the Kirkstall valley scheme, there is no evidence that the UDC is trying to bypass local community views. Its strategy and proposals are well known to the community and council, and two councillors serve on it. The hon. Gentleman has not shown why, apart from the overall strategy, which should be public knowledge, its detailed scrutiny of often confidential matters should be in the goldfish bowl of public debate.

Mr. Fatchett: I have already shown that there are important schemes, substantial investment, and substantial local interest involved. I am not saying, and never have, that sensitive commercial interests should be made public. Nobody is saying that, but everybody who has been involved in local government—and I presume that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West knows the nature of the rules in local government—will recognise that there is secrecy in commercial interest. I recognise that; I am not asking for that.

In relation to the road scheme, there has been no discussion whatsoever with local residents. There is no commercial interest that stops that discussion, and it is that degree of participation and openness that I am asking for, a basic minimum. The hon. Gentleman, by his reaction, understands the point I am making. There is a potential degree of consensus there, and I hope that the Minister recognises that.

There is, besides the right to know, a need for openness on the part of the UDC. If it is not open, given the scale of the projects with which it is dealing, there is always an argument that there is some lack of legitimacy attributed to the decisions taken by it. Openness gives legitimacy, as does consultation. I would not for a moment suggest that corruption surrounds the UDC. That is not the nature of my accusation. However, if the UDC is open and allows consultation, there is never any question of corruption because we know what is going on. If there is secrecy, it builds up a suspicion that there may be corruption around the organisation. In the UDC's own interest, there is a need for openness. So there are two reasons suggesting that the UDC should change its current practices: the right to know, and the need for openness.

The UDC makes a number of points in its own defence, but one defence it cannot use is that it is the planning authority; if the planning decisions were taken by local government, Leeds city council, these decisions would be subject to the Local Government (Access to Information Act) 1985. It is a strange paradox that, if there is a major or minor planning decision to be taken by the Leeds city council, that would be open as per the normal practices of local government. If there is a major or minor planning decision to be taken by the UDC, it will be taken behind closed doors. I see no justification whatsoever for that.

The Minister may say that the legislation does not provide for that access or openness in relation to the UDC. I recognise that, but I also say that the London Docklands UDC already allows openness; it allows journalists to be present at certain meetings, and it allows the public to be present. The Sheffield UDC is moving in exactly the same direction. I hope that the Minister will use his influence and powers to ensure that the Leeds UDC moves further in that direction.

A further argument made by the UDC is that openness —what the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West called "the goldfish bowl"—leads to inefficiency, but the fact that emerges from the evidence which has come into my possession is that the UDC is itself inefficient. Its secrecy does not breed efficiency; I suspect that its secrecy compounds inefficiency.

Let me give one or two examples. A firm called South Leeds Builders Merchants Ltd. received a letter from the UDC saying, without consultation or discussion, that that business would be subject to compulsory purchase. That is neither efficient nor the way in which the UDC should behave. The company secretary wrote to his own solicitor and kindly sent me a copy of his letter. I quote from Mr. Foster's letter:

> "To say I am astounded would be an understatement, as you would have thought that someone at The Leeds Development Corporation would have had the decency to forewarn, explain or indeed just discuss the plans affecting our premises and livelihood."

That inefficiency was recognised by Mr. Martin Eagland, the chief executive of Leeds urban development corporation. He replied on 21 March 1989 to Mr. Foster, the company secretary of South Leeds Builders Merchants Ltd., and made the following point:

> "I do apologise for the fact that you received no prior warning of the Development Corporation's intention to compulsorily acquire the freehold interest in the . . . site".

The Leeds urban development corporation ought to have talked to a company that it was about to make the subject of a compulsory purchase order.

Another example is Chapman Springs, a well-established engineering firm in south Leeds. It is now the subject of a compulsory purchase order without consultation, participation and information. From time to time a

number of hon. Members find it convenient to criticise the Post Office or British Telecom. They may feel that that was the reason why the Leeds urban development corporation was unable to talk to either South Leeds Builders Merchants Ltd. or Chapman Springs. Both firms are sited within 100 yd of the UDC's offices. I suspect that Mr. Peter Hartley, the chairman, and Mr. Martin Eagland, the chief executive, pass both firms on their way to and from the UDC's offices. A simple courtesy would have been to talk to the two firms. Jobs in two local businesses are at stake. One of the firms wrote to me and said that the Conservative Government pride themselves on their interest in small businesses, so it is difficult to understand how they can allow one of their organisations—the UDC —to behave in such a way.

Secrecy in the UDC has not bred efficiency. All the evidence suggests that secrecy has bred inefficiency. So far, the UDC's record is a catalogue of inefficiency and secrecy. For the sake of what I believe is important—the continuing development of Leeds—and for the most constructive relationship that is possible between local business, local residents and the city council, I ask the Minister to use his influence with the UDC to ensure that it conducts its business openly and does not continue with its current hole-in-the-wall approach. Such an approach will damage the work of the UDC and local business in Leeds. It is important that openness should be one of the UDC's characteristics. I hope that the Minister will join me in that campaign.

1.37 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Trippier): I welcome the interest of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) in the subject. I congratulate him sincerely on securing this Adjournment debate. I welcome the valuable contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) to which I shall return later.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central has already tabled a number of written questions about the UDC's responsibility for planning. I have been pleased to inform him about the very satisfactory progress being made in Leeds. I thought that his summary of the reasons for establishing the Leeds urban development corporation stretched credulity to breaking point.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to know precisely why the Government established an urban development corporation in Leeds, he could do no better than to read a pamphlet called "New Life for Inner Cities" which I wrote and which has recently been released. Unfortunately, I cannot give a copy to the hon. Gentleman. It costs £2·50, which I consider to be good value for money. That money will go to the Conservative party. We are always grateful for any contributions that we can get—certainly from Labour Members of Parliament.

The best illustration that I can give of why the Government set up an urban development corporation in Leeds relates to a meeting that I had with the former leader of Leeds city council, whom I have always liked, councillor George Mudie. He told me of the progress that had been made over the Leeds development company, with which the hon. Gentleman will be familiar. That is the longest gestation period known to man. It had been talked about for four years, and it had been in formation for three years. I asked councillor Mudie when he would appoint a chief executive and he said, "Soon". It is crass stupidity for the hon. Gentleman to describe to me and to the House anything to do with the UDC as a catalogue of inefficiency when we have such an example.

The Government believed that things should move a little more speedily than they have in the urban regeneration for the centre of Leeds. As the hon. Member knows, I visited the development corporation only last month. I was impressed by the way the corporation has started to implement the proposals contained in the strategic plan which it published last October. Land is being brought forward for development in partnership with the other agencies; environmental improvements are under way, and I know the corporation has the needs of both new and existing businesses uppermost in its mind. Those are no mean achievements for a corporation which has been in existence for only nine months. If not now, I hope that at some time in the future the hon. Gentleman will become as enthusiastic about what is being achieved on the ground in his home city as he seems to be about the procedures required to bring that about.

Before I reply to the more specific points which the hon. Gentleman has raised, the House may find it helpful if I say something about how the UDCs operate and relate that to what the hon. Gentleman has said.

UDCs have been set up by the Government as single-minded bodies. Their remit is to regenerate rundown urban areas by bringing land and buildings back into use and creating new businesses, jobs, an improved environment, new homes, recreation and leisure facilities. Already they are doing that, and in my view they are doing it very well. But UDCs are not local authorities, and they are not funded through the rating system. The arrangements established to ensure that local authorities are accountable to the local electorate are not therefore applicable. UDCs are funded largely by the Exchequer and they are accountable to Parliament through my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. They are subject to a fairly formidable array of procedures, which includes the Select Committee and Public Accounts Committee systems, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, and the Local Government Act 1988 which brought UDCs' planning activities within the ambit of the Commissioner for Local Administration—the local ombudsman. Each UDC produces an annual report, including a copy of its audited statement of accounts, which is laid before both Houses. Hon. Members will appreciate that those are just some of the arrangements which exist to safeguard accountability to Parliament, but it might help if I explain that when carrying out their development control functions all UDCs are required to operate in the same way as any other planning authority. That includes an obligation to carry out consultations and determine applications as laid down in the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988. The list of possible consultees, on any application, can be lengthy. It can include, for example, a local authority, the highway authority, the water authority, and the waste disposal authority.

Most UDCs have established agency arrangements whereby local authority staff receive and process planning applications. That hardly equates with charges of operating in secret, and perhaps more than anything else shows that, behind the rhetoric, co-operative and mutually beneficial working arrangements can and do exist between UDCs and local authorities, and I welcome that.

[Mr. David Trippier]

Councillor George Mudie persuaded me that in this context the Leeds city council should act as a planning agency for the UDCs. Apart from that, as the hon. Gentleman knows, at the time I was convinced that it was quite fair and proper that there should be a number of Labour party councillors appointed to the board.

Mr. Fatchett: The Minister talks in detail about the development control procedures, but one or two of my examples concern broader planning and development matters. I talked about the road scheme and about Chapman Springs in relation to the development of a business park. Those schemes are not covered by the development controls. They are the schemes that should be the subject of much greater consultation and much greater public scrutiny. If the Minister is prepared to persuade his colleagues in the UDC to move in that direction, we are beginning to move towards a consensus, but in relation to the road scheme, for instance, that involves the UDC recognising that my constituents, at a very early stage, have a legitimate voice.

Mr. Trippier: I should say two things to the hon. Gentleman. First, the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West was very relevant to this case, though I do not think there could be any possible criticism of the consultation that took place. Time permitting, I shall refer to that matter again. Certainly I want to see urban development corporations consulting local people. That is very important if we are to see this form of urban regeneration in that area. If the people themselves do not recognise that that form of urban regeneration is an improvement and that it will benefit them and the area as a whole, clearly the whole policy will have failed. On that matter there is a meeting of minds.

I do not know specifically about the case of the road network. Obviously I am not directly responsible for the Department of Transport. However, in an effort to be helpful, I shall look at the matter. I am anxious to convince the hon. Member that the UDC is very keen to consult, as are all UDCs. There may have been mistakes, particularly in the case of what I call the first-generation UDCs. One hopes that one can learn from mistakes, and that there will be improvements. But in the case of the second and third-generation UDCs it is perfectly clear that it is a necessary prerequisite for successful urban regeneration that they should carry the local communities with them.

Of course, circumstances vary from area to area. No two areas are the same, and no two UDCs are the same. It is therefore right that they should have discretion to organise themselves in the best way to achieve positive results. I must stress that all UDCs are well seized of the importance of carrying local opinion with them. Many UDC chairmen and chief executives spend a considerable amount of their time addressing public meetings up and down the urban development areas. I have indicated that I do not for a moment suggest that they have got everything absolutely right; I am not that stupid. It is always easy to find fault from the sidelines, as the hon. Gentleman has sought to do. It would be wrong of the Government to be too prescriptive about the way in which the UDCs carry out their business, as the hon. Member and certainly the Campaign for Freedom of Information would suggest. I believe that that is a matter for the UDCs to decide, with the overall arrangements that I have already described.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Trippier: I want to make a final point because we are running out of time.

A number of decisions will have to be made by the UDCs—decisions that certainly would be commercially confidential. As the hon. Gentleman made a number of political points—and I realise that he might have felt obliged to do so—may I make one important political point from my party's point of view? I find it a bit difficult to take it when any member of the Labour party talks about secrecy or about excluding the press from meetings. My experience in local government—which, I am glad to say, is pretty long—is that the Labour party is the first to exclude the press from meetings of this kind. I am sure that that experience is shared by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Fatchett: The Minister might be reassured to know that Leeds city council won an award for its willingness to open up and to disclose information. So, in this respect, it is a model authority. The Minister argues that he does not want to be prescriptive. He knows the position taken by the docklands corporation, and he knows the position that Sheffield is likely to take. Will he give the Leeds UDC some indication that it would make sense to move in the same direction as its sister UDCs in docklands and in Sheffield?

Mr. Trippier: The Leeds city council has won an award for openness. I only wish that it had won an award for speed of inner city regeneration through the Leeds Development Company. I accept that a number of urban development corporations provide the type of access that the hon. Gentleman seeks for the Leeds UDC, and the London Docklands UDC is undoubtedly one. Certainly I shall be very happy to draw to the attention of the chairman and the board of the Leeds UDC the matters that the hon. Gentleman has raised this evening, but I repeat that the Department does not wish in any way to be prescriptive in this regard. It is entirely a matter for the UDC. I personally feel that in practice there can be little or no difficulty, in view of the representation on the board not only from the hon. Gentleman's party but from the private sector, which he was quick to mention.

I emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West that there will be quite a number of interested parties in Leeds whose best interests might not be served by knowing too much about the confidential matters that are discussed before the board. That is a matter of judgment, principally for the board.

I hope that in future the hon. Member for Leeds, Central will find himself able to support the Leeds UDC and the work that it does to regenerate that vitally important city.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRIT

For Vale of Glamorgan, in the room of Sir Herbert Raymond Gower, Knight, deceased.—*[Mr. Waddington.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Drugs (East European Route)

1. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the east European route for the supply of drugs has now been closed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Timothy Eggar): Relatively small, but increasing quantities of illicit drugs continue to reach the United Kingdom via eastern Europe. We are developing our co-operation with the Governments concerned to combat drug trafficking.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that although the situation remains far from satisfactory, efforts are being made to block that route, and the only way that that will be achieved will be by the continuation of intergovernmental co-operation?

Mr. Eggar: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There are a number of routes through eastern Europe into western Europe, mainly for drugs originating in Afghanistan or the neighbouring countries. We now have close co-operation with a number of eastern European Governments, particularly the Soviet authorities, as a result of which Operation Diplomat recently led to a large seizure of cannabis.

Mr. Ron Brown: Have not the east European, Soviet and Afghan authorities done a great deal to clamp down on this evil trade? It must be remembered, as the Minister said, that most of the drugs come from Afghanistan, thus providing additional resources for the Mujaheddin whom, ironically, the Government support.

Mr. Eggar: As usual, the hon. Gentleman has a skewed view of the world. I have already said that there is close co-operation with the Soviet authorities and with other Governments in the fight against drugs, and that is how it should be. We shall not defeat the threat from drugs unless all Governments combine against it.

Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Human Rights)

2. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to Hungary and Czechoslovakia about human rights abuses in those countries.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): We have made bilateral representations to the Czechoslovak authorities four times this year about their handling of human rights issues. We have not raised human rights issues with the Hungarian Government recently as Hungary's record on these matters is relatively good.

Mr. Knapman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I agree that the Hungarian Government's record on human rights is better than that of Czechoslovakia, but can my hon. Friend assure the House that those differing standards will be taken into account if either of those countries seeks closer economic co-operation with the west, and particularly with EC countries?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes a good point in relation not just to those countries but to others in eastern Europe. The EC has recently halted all negotiations with Romania on the matters to which he refers. It is obviously right that the progress of countries in that respect should be reflected in our relations with them generally.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not the height of political illiteracy for the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), who has never worried about such matters in South Africa or Chile, to compare Czechoslovakia, which remains the prison house of Europe, with Hungary where, as the Minister has conceded, there has been remarkable progress? If European Governments are to be represented on 16 June in Budapest, when the remains of Imre Nagy are to be reburied, will the British Government be represented? It should not be forgotten that when the Hungarian uprising was crushed in blood in November 1956 the Tory Government were engaged in criminal action at Suez.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has managed to widen the question to take in Suez and a number of other matters. It is a little unwise of him to accuse my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) of illiteracy. My hon. Friend was making the perfectly justified point that one of those countries is meeting its conference on security and co-operation in Europe obligations while the other is not. That is the distinction.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the reburial of Nagy. We have not yet considered that, but I will write to the hon. Gentleman about it. Mr. Nagy's memory has not yet been restored to its proper place. As Mr. Grosz recently made clear, Mr. Nagy is being reburied as a humanitarian gesture, but he has not been rehabilitated. We should like the Hungarians to go a little further on that.

Mr. Boswell: Does my hon. Friend accept that in many respects, not just this one, the Warsaw pact is a case of some animals being more equal than others? In relation, for example, to the relaxation of visa requirements, which I welcome in principle, will he bear in mind the importance of taking matters one step at a time and making them

conditional on adequate performance in relation to human rights in individual countries and on the performance of their security services?

Mr. Waldegrave: All those matters should be taken into account, but none of us should miss the opportunity of recognising that the Hungarians and the Poles, having recognised that Socialism does not work, are steadily moving away from it.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Minister agree that in Czechoslovakia there remains substantial evidence of discrimination, particularly against doctors and teachers, 21 years after they chose to express their opinions freely? Will he make further strong representations to the Czechoslovak Government in that respect?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. and learned Gentleman is entirely right. We have recently been protesting about the whole new series of trials that have been held in Czechoslovakia. The most famous is that of Vaclav Havel, but he is not alone. The tragic thing about Czechoslovakia is that it is a country with a tradition of democracy which wants to make real progress but it has a Government who are resisting the clear but carefully expressed will of their people.

Conventional Forces

3. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the progress of negotiations to reduce conventional forces in Europe.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Sir Geoffrey Howe): Two negotiations—one on conventional armed forces in Europe and one on confidence and security-building measures—began in Vienna on 6 March. The discussions have got off to a good, businesslike start. I presented radical Western proposals for both sets of talks on 6 March. We now look for a response from the East.

Mr. Waller: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that although the Vienna talks have got off to a good and constructive start, they are bound to be long drawn out in view of the many complexities involved and the many different weapons systems in Europe? Given the asymmetry of conventional weapons and arms in Europe, does he agree that we have no choice but to rely on a nuclear deterrent for our total security for what may be a considerable time?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There is no doubt that my hon. Friend is right in the last part of what he says. The central problem is the gross inequality between the conventional forces available to the Warsaw pact and those available to the NATO Alliance. There is progress in the fact that that inequality is now acknowledged by the Warsaw pact and it is recognised that unequal reductions are necessary to achieve an outcome that will be acceptable in the end.

Mr. James Lamond: Does the Foreign Secretary think that it helps to advance the possibility of weapons reductions throughout the world when he sits in the Guildhall smiling and nodding while Mr. Gorbachev outlines the Soviet Union's unilateral proposals but then goes around the world slagging off those efforts and doing everything he can to undermine any possibility of confidence-building between our two nations?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman, as always, has a wholly inaccurate perception of the facts. The proposals put forward by Mr. Gorbachev at the Guildhall were of a very modest nature. Perhaps the most important and least attractive part of them was his attempt to bring nuclear weapons back into the negotiations and to suggest that there can be no progress on conventional arms reductions so long as there is no progress on nuclear weapons. In doing that, he was going unhelpfully right outside the terms of reference of the talks.

Sir Peter Blaker: What recent developments have there been in the attitude of the Soviet Union to the key question of verification, which is relevant not only to conventional disarmament but to the possible abolition of chemical weapons? Am I right in thinking that the recent trial inspection of chemical weapons establishments in the Soviet Union was somewhat disappointing? Will my right hon. and learned Friend continue to give a lead on this important matter, as he has been doing in recent years?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: With regard to the conventional negotiations, the mandate rightly calls for strict and effective verification measures. That is crucial to its success. The Soviet Union has demonstrated its ability to agree on such matters by its acceptance of the necessary measures in the intermediate nuclear forces treaty. My right hon. Friend is, however, entirely right to point out that the Soviet Union's absence of candour and failure to be straightforward about the size of its chemical weapons stocks, and the lack of openness of investigation during the recent visit to Shikhany, illustrate how far there is to go.

Occupied Territories (Human Rights)

4. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent United States State Department report on human rights violations in the territories occupied by Israel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The State Department's assessment is in line with our own.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Minister agree that the United States State Department report was devastating, showing that thousands of Palestinians had been detained without trial and thousands had been injured by the activities of the Israel Defence Force in the last 17 months of occupation, and that more than 400 had been killed in that period—including, when I was last there two weeks ago, a four-year-old girl? When will pressure be put on the Israeli Government to reduce the carnage?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is relatively unusual for the hon. Gentleman to endorse what is said by the United States State Department. It emphasises the fact that there is no doubt about the unacceptability of Israeli behaviour in the occupied territories. That is recognised by a wide spectrum of opinion—it would be hard to be find a wider spectrum. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the British Government and other Governments in the European Community have repeatedly made their views clear.

Mr. Adley: a few moments ago, in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), my hon. Friend the Minister said that relations between eastern European countries and the Community would depend on violations of human rights not taking place. In view of the obvious violation of human rights by Israel in the occupied territories, why the double standards?

Mr. Waldegrave: As my hon. Friend knows, the relationship between Israel and the European Community came into question over the access of goods to the Community from the occupied territories, particularly Gaza. Speeches in the European Parliament and elsewhere had a pronounced effect. In general, however, we believe —I believe that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) is with us on this—that it is not sensible to try to change a country such as Israel by means of threats. Israel is a genuine democracy. We must engage her own public opinion, and persuade Israelis who want to make that change freely.

Mr. David Young: In his talks with Israel, has the Minister entered into any discussion about resolving the difficulties in the Lebanon, which seems to be a key issue in this worrying saga?

Mr. Waldegrave: It remains one of our principal quarrels with Israel that Israel still has troops in the Lebanon, and we refuse to sell weapons to Israel until she has accepted the relevant Security Council resolution and withdrawn her troops. That is one of the matters that come up regularly.

Mr. Rhodes James: Is my hon. Friend aware that Israel has many friends on both sides of the House, in this country as a whole and in the West, and it is those friends who are the most dismayed by the report and by developments in Israel? Will my hon. Friend convey that very strongly to the Israeli Government?

Mr. Waldegrave: One of the most impressive recent developments is that genuine friends of Israel on both sides of the House—indeed, all sections of opinion in this country and also in the United States—have begun to make it clear to the Israeli Government and people that they do not consider the policy on which Israel is engaged to be either right or sensible. My hon. Friend's own part in that is important.

Middle East

5. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent progress made towards achieving a settlement in the middle east.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There have been a number of positive developments—the PLO's renunciation of terrorism, Israel's recognition that the status quo is untenable, the constructive attitude of the Soviet Union, and the determination of the United States to work actively for a settlement.

We continue to believe that an international conference remains the most suitable framework for negotiations between the parties.

Mr. Sumberg: Bearing in mind the sale of bombers to Libya, the continuing civil conflict in the Lebanon and the tragedy of Lockerbie, is not the caution and scepticism of the Government of Israel at the PLO's renunciation of violence understandable? Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that just as he would be cautious if the IRA were to announce tomorrow that it had renounced the bomb and the bullet, Israel has understandable reasons for taking a cautious view of events in the middle east?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have explained to the House on more than one occasion my understanding of that. The length of time before the PLO made the important concessions to which I referred is certainly a ground for caution on the part of Israel. However, the Israeli people and Government have to understand that although we are committed to Israel's right to a secure existence, we are also committed to the view that Israel's security can be achieved only through peace with all her neighbours. Above all, Israelis cannot deny to the Palestinians the rights that they themselves have earned at such cost. Repression of Palestinians breeds resentment and hatred, which is the exact opposite of security. Fortunately, more and more Israelis understand that fact, as does the overwhelming body of opinion in the House. The search for peace along those lines deserves—and is receiving—the active support of more and more Israelis.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Can the Foreign Secretary tell us of one positive result of the most recent visit by the Israeli Prime Minister to the United States?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The proposals put forward by Mr. Shamir for elections may point in the right direction and are worth exploring in detail without dismissing them out of hand. It is also important to emphasise the statement made by President Bush after his talks with President Mubarak that

> "The goals of the peace process should be security for Israel, the end of the occupation and the achievement of Palestinian political rights".

That statement should be studied carefully in Israel as it is important to the progress of the negotiations.

Sir Dennis Walters: Bearing in mind among other reasons the continuing oppression and violation of human rights by the Israelis on the West Bank and Gaza, is not the hesitancy and slowness of the Bush Administration rather disappointing? Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that he is doing everything in his power to put some speed into the Americans by pointing out that the problem has continued for a very long time and that excessive caution is a mistake?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise that the United States engagement in the peace process is absolutely vital. That means that the new Administration must take a leading role, and we shall certainly support them in that role. We have already made our position plain. I shall be going to Washington at the weekend to discuss the topic along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Janner: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the making of peace in the middle east is a very complex matter? Those of us who are desperately anxious that the parties should be brought together in negotiation recognise the sensitivities of both sides, not least the anxiety of all Israelis in their genuine democracy that their country should be safe from attack, their worries about the dangers that a Palestinian state on the West Bank and in Gaza would create, and their fears

that a terrorist enemy which now says that it has renounced terrorism cannot be trusted with the lives of their people.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand fully the point articulated by the hon. and learned Gentleman, namely Israel's anxiety that it should not take steps that might weaken rather than enhance its security, and I understand why that rests against a background of threats to the security of that state. However, it is Israeli opinion that is emphasising that the status quo cannot be maintained and is recognising the need to move forward. Time is not on the side of those who seek a peaceful solution, whether they be in Israel or among the Palestinians. The Israeli leadership and people must recognise, for example, the impact upon the other side of the sheer arithmetic of 420 Palestinians having been killed in the occupied territories compared with only 13 Israelis. That balance of hardship and human suffering cannot be allowed to endure indefinitely. For their own sake, the Israelis must respond to the mounting sense of urgency about the situation.

President Bush

6. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the President of the United States of America; and what matters will be discussed.

8. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any present plans to visit the United States of America.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I plan to visit the United States next Sunday and Monday, 16 and 17 April. Following President Gorbachev's visit last week, East-West relations and arms control will be on the agenda. I also expect to discuss regional issues, particularly the middle east and southern Africa.

Mr. Conway: I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement that he will be visiting Washington next week. When he meets President Bush, will he assure him that, despite the warmth of the reception received by President Gorbachev on his recent visit to the United Kingdom, we are not gullible and there is still a constant need to be prepared for all eventualities in relation to countries which still do not appreciate a true democracy? Will he assure him that we still need to maintain a proper role in NATO and that the steadfastness of the United States in this matter is still deeply appreciated?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly make the central point of my hon. Friend's question when I meet members of the United States Administration. They, too, will share our feeling that the changes taking place in the foreign policy thinking of the Soviet Administration represent a challenge and an opportunity, as has been pointed out in the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. However, they will also understand the central point made by my hon. Friend that we need to maintain our vigilance and unity in defence of our security because it is that formula which has helped us to move as far as we have in recent years.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: During the talks in Washington, will my right hon. and learned Friend thank the United States Administration for their strenuous efforts to inhibit the fund-raising activities of extreme Irish nationalist groups on behalf of the IRA? Will he also make it clear that neither Government will relax their vigilance so long as the terrorist threat remains?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly emphasise my hon. Friend's last point. Neither Government should or will relax their vigilance so long as the threat remains in any form. It is also right to say that the United States Government have taken significant steps to inhibit the fund-raising activities of extreme Irish nationalist groups. The House appreciates that, as I shall make clear when I am in Washington.

Mr. Steel: If during his discussions in Washington the Foreign Secretary is tempted to press for an early commitment to the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons in Europe, will he make it clear that he does so without the support of the other European members of NATO?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall conduct my discussions on that topic in Washington and elsewhere on the basis of the Brussels communiqué of the North Atlantic Council in February last year—that it is necessary for NATO to continue to modernise its weapons, nuclear and conventional, where necessary.

Mrs. Clwyd: Will the Foreign Secretary raise the important question of the future of Kampuchea, given that the Vietnamese troops are to be withdrawn completely in September? Will he convey the great concern of many hon. Members that any future political settlements must ensure that there can be no return to power of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly discuss Cambodia with the United States Government in the light of the prospective withdrawal of Vietnamese troops, just as I did last week with Mr. Shevardnadze and a few weeks ago with the Chinese Foreign Minister. As on both those occasions, I shall make it clear that this House and the overwhelming body of opinion round the world would regard the return of Pol Pot and his cronies as an intolerable prospect.

Mr. Kilfedder: As the Foreign Secretary will be aware, another terrible atrocity has been committed today by the IRA in Northern Ireland. Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that in the United States, the IRA and its front organisations are consistent in their propaganda campaign in the media? Surely it is time for this Government and the United States Government to counter that campaign, which brings in funds for the IRA.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to underline the importance of putting that message across. It is a message that has been put across in every possible way by our embassy and staff over there, and by a series of visits by, among others, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. That message will go on being put across by this Government in every possible way. Alongside that, incidentally, we shall also hammer home our opposition to the so-called MacBride campaign because it is counter-productive to investment and takes no account of our own fair employment proposals, which are more radical and more effective.

Mr. Kaufman: Was not the Foreign Secretary's response to the question put by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) a deliberate and disingenuous attempt to dodge the issue on the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons? Is it not a fact that Belgium, Norway, Denmark and Spain have made it clear that they are against forcing an early decision on modernisation, that the Netherlands and the Federal Germans have great misgivings and that the President of France gave the Prime Minister the brush-off by saying that it was a sovereign decision for the Federal German Government? Why is the Prime Minister alone, of all the NATO heads of Government in Europe, impervious to reason on that issue?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman never loses his gift for getting something absolutely wrong. As I told the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel), NATO committed itself in principle last year to the modernisation of nuclear and conventional weapons where necessary. It is agreed that short-range nuclear weapons are one type of weapon that needs to be modernised and there is no doubt about that. The only question, about which there are widely varying views, is at what point particular decisions need to be taken in that respect. As it has in the past, NATO will reach an agreed conclusion without any help from the right hon. Gentleman.

Single Market

7. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department is taking through its offices in other European Community states to help to prepare for the single market in 1992; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): British embassies are fully involved in lobbying and reporting on single market measures. They also provide a range of services to help British exporters make the most of growing opportunities.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that there is a great deal that her Department can do to help British industry—not only manufacturing industry, but service and professional industries such as engineering contracting, consulting and distribution—to prepare for 1992?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will know that the agreement that we have reached on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is an important opportunity for British professionals to ply their trade abroad. Service industries, just as much as manufacturing industries, can contribute greatly and we hope that they will all participate in the setting of European standards because without their help in achieving the right technical standards we shall not be as well prepared as we could be.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister recall that there was a hype a few years ago in the City about the big bang that was going to occur and that there was the same kind of co-ordinated propaganda about how well Britain was going to do? In fact the City got nothing out of it and the invisibles have fallen rather than risen. Does the Minister expect the big bang of the single European market to be more or less successful than that in the City?

Mrs. Chalker: We make steady, positive and continuing progress towards success in the City. When I see the hon. Gentleman and his big bang, I know that steady, solid progress is much to be preferred. I can say firmly to him that I believe that the United Kingdom's financial sector, which is by far the largest in Europe, is likely to be the most successful. Financial services will stand us in very good stead in Europe.

Mr. Wells: What work is my right hon. Friend doing in preparing this country to debate the issues that are likely to be in the Delors committee report on central banking and the single European unit of account? How can our country have an opportunity to discuss and understand those issues before there are decisions and discussions at the Europe Council?

Mrs. Chalker: I doubt whether any decisions are going to be arrived at the next European Council. It is far too early to say, when the report of the Delors committee will possibly come forward only later this month and will have its first examination in the ECOFIN Council in May. We will thoroughly discuss everything in that report and see what progress can be made. We should never underestimate this country's practical commitment, by the introduction of ecu-dominated Treasury bonds, to the development of better monetary co-operation throughout the Community.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister confirm that, with the free movement of people, Common Market nationals will have the right to enter the United Kingdom without a visa, bring children up to the age of 21, their parents and their grandparents, be able to undertake employment without a work permit, and establish businesses without any evidence of financial resources? Will she reflect on those matters when she examines the family disunity and separation that is caused to many British citizens who originate from the Indian sub-continent? Because of the Government's unfair yet firm immigration policy, for years they have been separated by thousands of miles from their spouses and families.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman knows that European Community nationals have total reciprocity in those mattters. Our immigration policy is based on sensible, longstanding reasons. The one does not affect the other.

Mr. Rowe: Is it true that the momentum towards the Common Market in 1992 is now virtually unstoppable? Does my right hon. Friend agree that it does nobody any good to start casting doubts on it as being some kind of fiasco or disaster? It is a great opportunity, particularly for small firms in this country.

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. We are making good progress in dismantling barriers to trade. It is quite wrong for any commentator, whoever he may be, to say that 1992 measures are failing. More than 40 per cent. of the issues that were raised in the 1985 White Paper have been agreed. We have progressed almost daily. I was delighted to see the European Court of Justice's judgment on air fares, which was reported in the press this morning. That judgment represents a significant step towards our

aim to liberalise international air transport and bring down the cost of air fares to the ordinary travelling public. The court said that, from now on, airlines should clear their price-fixing controls between Community countries directly with the Commission. That is another great step forward.

Mr. Robertson: Does the Minister agree that, although Britain has not done very well in Europe, Europe has done very well in Britain?

Mrs. Chalker: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman must look at his figures again.

Cyprus

9. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's financial contribution towards the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

Mrs. Chalker: Britain's contribution towards the cost of the United Nations force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) in the financial year 1989-90 is estimated at £22·87 million, net of recoveries.

Mr. Bennett: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the United Kingdom is the only member of the Security Council that pays its dues in full? What action is being taken by the United Kingdom to press the other countries to make their full payments towards this force?

Mrs. Chalker: Indeed we have been paying our full amounts towards this force. The account is in deficit by some $167 million, as my hon. Friend knows, but the United Kingdom is not in deficit. We have absorbed all our own costs since 1964, and we have encouraged all other nations to contribute fully. I hope very much that many other states, including France and the Soviet Union, will stop resisting the change from voluntary contributions to assessed contributions. That would go a long way towards solving the problem.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to pay tribute to the British soldiers who have served with that force over many years? Is it true to say that we carry the bulk of the administrative burden, not only of the United Nations force in Cyprus but of the peacekeeping force in Lebanon? Can he confirm that we supply the biggest element of that force in Cyprus, and, but for its presence, the number of deaths on both sides of the green line might have been considerably greater over the years?

Mrs. Chalker: Indeed, I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the whole British contingent —currently 741 officers and men, or about one third of the total force—who have worked extremely hard. They bring a very special balance to a very difficult situation, and they continue to give absolutely first-class assistance in this very difficult area. We only hope that the negotiations towards resolving the problems of Cyprus will soon again proceed smoothly, and we wish both sides well in their efforts to find a solution that is acceptable to all.

Israeli Foreign Minister

10. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Israeli Foreign Minister of State; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to visit Israel later this year, and looks forward to discussing bilateral and regional issues with Professor Arens then.

Mr. Galloway: When the Foreign Minister meets Professor Arens will he raise the question of the arrest yesterday of two prominent leaders of the Palestinian community on the West Bank—the distinguished Jerusalem journalist Sam'an Khouri, and Adnan Shalalda? Today those men were charged before a military court with being leaders of their own people in the territory in which they live and have always lived. Will the Minister point out the irony of the absurd proposal by the Israeli Administration to hold elections to identify such leaders at a time when any leaders who do emerge are either shot down in the street or clamped in irons for months on end?

Mr. Waldegrave: I certainly agree with the hon. Member that it is no way to develop a sensible dialogue with the leaders of the Palestinians to treat people in that way. We have made regular representations, and I should think that we shall have an opportunity to make representations on these cases well before my right hon. and learned Friend goes to Israel.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that handing back the Taba enclave to Egypt has been very much to Israel's advantage, and will he make that point to the ambassador?

Mr. Waldegrave: What the Taba incident demonstrates to Israel and to others in the region is that it is possible to resolve disputes by means of law and treaty. In a sense, that is the main significance of Taba, and I should have thought that, small though it is, it reminds people that it is possible to solve disputes in a way other than by force.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Minister agree that the most vital component, or at least one of the most vital components, of the struggle for peace in the middle east is the necessity for Israel to have discussions with the PLO? The PLO is recognised throughout the middle east—by all the Arab nations, as well as by the people of Palestine—as the representative of the Palestinians. Let it be made clear to the Israelis that they took lands away from the Palestinian people by force, and that before there can be a peace settlement in the middle east there must be a conference involving Britain and America, along with the PLO and the Israelis. Will the Minister impress that on the Israelis with all the prestige that Britain commands in this area?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is certainly our view that the Israelis will not find it possible to conduct negotiations with the Palestinian leaders in the occupied territories without talking to people who identify themselves with the PLO, and they will not find such people. It is the British Government's position that there should be an international conference under the aegis of the five permanent members of the Security Council but, in a sense, that matter is secondary. We want to get the process going and

believe that such a conference would ultimately be the best way of establishing a framework for the direct talks which must take place between the Israelis and the other parties to the dispute.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will my hon. Friend make it perfectly clear that the British Government see no need for elections in the occupied territories to find out who represents the Palestinian people because it is well known that the PLO does? Does my hon. Friend agree that the idea of such an election is merely a means of trying to postpone having a proper international conference, which is obviously the right way forward?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am not sure that I would put it in quite that way. I would emphasise that the Palestinians would be chary of taking part in any elections that did not lead to a further process that would result ultimately in negotiations about the final status of the territories. From what I have understood of the PLO position and of its reactions to Mr. Shamir's proposals, if it believes that such elections are part of a continuing process, it would consider them seriously, but it does not wish to be caught in a cul de sac of voting only for municipal elections or for something that establishes Israeli hegemony over the territories.

Romania (Human Rights)

11. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made on human rights violations to the Government of Romania.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I raised Romania's appalling human rights record with the Romanian Foreign Minister in Vienna on 6 March. We deplore the Romanian Government's failure to meet their commitments under the Helsinki agreements and, in particular, their continuing policy of systematisation. We urge them to heed international calls for an end to repression and intimidation.

Mr. Flynn: The Government are to be congratulated on their leadership of the European protest against Ceausescu, a leader who increasingly oppresses his own people with the primitive cruelty and arrogance of a mediaeval tyrant. However, is it not time for the Government to lead a new initiative against the process of systemisation—a process of cultural pogroms—which is sending the process of civilisation into reverse in Romania, and against the most savage breaches of human rights in any country in Europe? Would it not be a start to the new initiative if Britain stripped from Ceausescu the honour that was given to him in 1978 in the same way that we have taken honours from past Members of the House and other citizens of this country when they no longer deserve those honours?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The whole House will have sympathy with the vehemence with which the hon. Gentleman condemns what is happening in Romania. Condemnation is being expressed not only by Western countries because it is notable that even the Soviet Union and other Warsaw pact partners of Romania have failed to support that country in recent proceedings before the European Commission of human rights. Condemnation of that cultural and human savagery is widespread.

However, the award to which the hon. Gentleman referred was conferred long ago as part of the longstanding arrangements for the exchange of courtesies during state visits. Although there have been occasions in wartime when our enemies in recent conflicts have had their awards taken away, there is no precedent for depriving the holder of an honorary award in peacetime. It is not judged right to depart from that rule in this case. However, that does not in any sense diminish my sympathy with the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Bernard Braine: In view of the appalling human rights record of Romania under the corrupt and repressive Ceausescu regime, the fact that it has become an acute embarrassment even to its Warsaw pact partners, the creation of a major refugee problem by the enforced devillagisation that is taking place in Transylvania and in view of the fact that our own ambassador has been manhandled by the police in that country, is it not high time to show our disgust and our repugnance with this regime and to withdraw our ambassador?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand totally why my right hon. Friend makes that point so strongly. One of the purposes of retaining an ambassador there is to continue to fight against the very conditions that my right hon. Friend describes. He is right that our ambassador and members of his staff were grotesquely ill-treated on an occasion when they were trying to establish contact with the historian, Doina Cornea, who has been outrageously treated. It is also right that more recently our embassy was able to establish contact with her, which has been of value. It confirms that she is continuing to be extremely badly treated, both in encirclement and in being deprived of communication with the outside world. That in itself justifies a continued presence there, although my right hon. Friend's statement of anguish about what is going on in Romania is equally justified.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Can the Secretary of State tell us what representations have been made to the Romanian authorities? Is it not time that words of condemnation were backed by action?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As was conceded by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) in his supplementary question, the United Kingdom has been playing a leading part in mobilising action by the Community in demarche after demarche. We have been making representations with continuous vigour. We have also been able to block progress on the negotiations that were due to take place between the Community and Romania. So we have intervened effectively in the way that was open to us. We shall continue to mobilise as much condemnation as we can of the intolerable conduct of the Romanian Government.

Mr. William Powell: My right hon. and learned Friend's robust denunciation of the despicable regime in Bucharest will be widely welcomed in the House, in the country and across all countries of Europe. My right hon. and learned Friend has said that there is no precedent for stripping the President of the Romanian Republic of honours that have been accorded to him. Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there are times when new precedents must be set? This is probably a case where we should begin the process.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I take note of my hon. Friend's point. Perhaps the most important point is the immense strength of feeling expressed on all sides of the House. I am sure that that in itself will underline a crucial message to the Government of Romania. One only hopes that it may make some difference to their conduct.

Namibia

12. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in implementing United Nations resolution 435 on Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear in Windhoek on 1 April, we are actively supporting the United Nations operation in Namibia. It is vital that the parties abide strictly by their obligations under the United Nations plan for Namibian independence.

Miss Lestor: In order to counter the feeling among many that South Africa is having far too great an influence on the implementation of independence, can the right hon. Lady tell us whether she supports the call made on 8 and 9 April at the Mount Etjo conference that the full United Nations transition assistance group force should be implemented, and whether she would also endorse the United Nation's view that South Africa should not be allowed to interrogate SWAPO guerillas? Will she recommend that in future SWAPO should be involved in discussions of the implementation of the resolution?

Mrs. Chalker: It may interest the hon. Lady to know that the Mount Etjo declaration is being placed in the Library. The full UNTAG troops will get there as soon as possible. I was pleased yesterday to be able to announce that we have given a gift to the United Nations of the use of 55 Land Rovers and 12 four-wheeled trucks to try to help, while other equipment is on the high seas. In talking to those concerned about whether returning SWAPO guerillas to Angola will be interrogated, we have been assured that any information from the SWAPO forces will be sought by UNTAG and it will be solely directed towards the implementation of the Mount Etjo plan.

Mr. Gardiner: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the essence of resolution 435 is that fair and free elections should be held in Namibia to determine its future? Will my right hon. Friend investigate allegations that British taxpayers' money is going through the European Community to give a preponderant advantage to SWAPO, despite its recent violations of the peace accord? Will she do her utmost to ensure that all parties can participate in those elections on an equal basis?

Mrs. Chalker: Of course, there must be free and fair elections and everything must be done through the United Nations, whose responsibility it is, to ensure that that is so. We have no evidence of my hon. Friend's accusation that funds are being given to SWAPO and, in fact, I have written about that only this morning, or last night. In addition, I believe that it is absolutely vital that we do all that we can to support UNTAG in its most difficult task of maintaining the peace and proceeding towards those free and fair elections.

Mr. Boateng: Does the Minister agree that it would be highly damaging to UNTAG, and to the implementation of resolution 435, if elements of the Koevet unit—the notoriously murderous unit of the South African army —were to be in any way engaged in the policing of the withdrawal of SWAPO? Does she further agree that that is likely because that unit now comprises almost half of the South African police force in Namibia?

Mrs. Chalker: I am certain from what I have heard this morning that the task of the fully deployed contingents from the United Kingdom and Australia, who will be manning the nine assembly points, accompanied by UNTAG military observers—but, indeed, with the police and the Angolans alongside, as agreed under the Mount Etjo declaration—will be to see that the SWAPO forces return north of the 16th parallel in Angola. It is clear, too, that those members of the South African forces who may be alongside will be under the direction and supervision of the United Nations forces there and, indeed, our own forces.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Was my right hon. Friend able to discuss with the Soviet delegation in London last week the situation in Namibia and Angola, especially as President Gorbachev had recently returned from Cuba, which is well known to be heavily involved in the activities in that area?

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend talked with Mr. Shevardnadze last week. Our efforts, especially those of the Prime Minister and her decisive intervention in Windhoek on 1 April, have been warmly welcomed by the President of the Soviet Union, by the President of Angola and by the Cubans. I regret that Opposition Members should seek to try to bring party politics into such a subject.

Mr. Anderson: Is not the Minister being just a little naive about the cease-fire assembly points? Apart from members of the South African forces who may be present, is it not correct that the South African militia—the South West Africa Territorial Force—is in the majority at those cease-fire assembly points and that a South African spokesman has said that UNTAG would be permitted to be present during interrogations? Who gave the Government those assurances? Will the Government ensure that visiting parliamentarians from western Europe are given visas to be present to monitor the electoral process and that SWAPO is given reasonable facilities for access to the media during the electoral process?

Mrs. Chalker: I must remind the hon. Gentleman that the British Government are not in charge of what is going on in Namibia, but the United Nations. Many of the questions that he has posed are questions for the United Nations. We are working in support of the United Nations' transition assistance group to get those free and fair elections. That will obviously mean all parties to the election wanting access to put their points over.

I further say to the hon. Gentleman that, of course, at the present time—with South African forces on the ground —the United Nations has not been able to get all its forces there, because there was a filibuster after the United Nations Secretary General put his plan to the Security Council. That was not by this country, which warned again and again that, if there was a delay in coming to a conclusion in the Security Council, and then the General Assembly, there would not be full deployment on 1 April.

Those responsible for the filibuster are responsible for the fact that United Nations forces were not there. Others had to be used under United Nations supervision. They are being used only in support of UNTAG until other forces arrive.

Angola

13. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's recent contacts with Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: There are regular contacts with representatives of the Angolan Government in the normal course of diplomatic relations.

Mr. Coombs: While welcoming the regional peace settlement, the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and Angola's application to the international monetary fund, which are evidence of more flexibility by Angola in its attitude to the West, does my right hon. Friend agree that Angola is still divided between the Marxist PLA and the equally unattractive Jonas Savimbi who has recently been accused of human rights abuses? What proposals have the Government, either on a regional basis or through the United Nations, to ensure democracy and peace in Angola?

Mrs. Chalker: I am pleased to say that the President of Angola has played a constructive role in helping to get the United Nations plan back on the road in Namibia. Having concentrated on doing that, the next step for peace in Namibia is to seek internal reconciliation for peace in Angola. We welcome the proposal for a regional security conference with Angola's neighbours. There is no doubt that we shall not see lasting peace in Angola until the parties come together. I have made it clear that a military solution in Angola is not possible. It needs to proceed towards a peaceful reconciliation between both parties.

Mr. Speaker: Motion under Standing Order No. 20 —Mr. Robert Hughes.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North) *indicated dissent*

Mr. Speaker: Presentation of Bill.

BILL PRESENTED

Religious Prosecutions Abolition

Mr. Tony Benn, supported by Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. David Steel, Sir Ian Gilmour, Ms. Jo Richardson, Sir Cyril Smith, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Bernie Grant, Sir Russell Johnston, Mr. John Gorst, Ms. Diane Abbott and Mr. Eric S. Heffer presented a Bill to abolish prosecutions for the expression of opinion on matters of religion: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 April and to be printed. [Bill 115.]

Abolition of Welsh County Councils (Creation of Unitary Local Authorities)

3.32 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to abolish Welsh county councils by the creation of unitary local authorities.

Colleagues may say, "Not another local government Bill," but I make no apologies for seeking to introduce such a Bill. The time has come to debate again the structure of local government in England and Wales. That is especially appropriate in this centenary year of the county council system which was an enacted by the Local Government Act 1888.

Local government is vital and plays an important role in our national life and in helping to administer our country. However, it is top-heavy. There are three tiers of local government outside London and the metropolitan districts. They are the counties, districts and boroughs and the parish councils or, in Wales, the community councils. I want to concentrate on Wales because specific questions about that part of the United Kingdom need to be addressed. The Association of District Councils in its report "Closer to the People" said:

"Nowhere are the arguments for change put forward in the previous chapters more relevant than in Wales, highlighted by the remoteness of County government and by major difficulties in co-ordinating service provision between the County and District tiers. The 37 Welsh Districts provide a sense of identity and community which cannot be matched by the County structure. The latter, in terms of service provision, operates in the main through a system of area offices largely coterminous with existing district boundaries, and accountable to a distant County Hall. They do not provide a focus for the local community of interest."

The association's report continued:

"Welsh local government's reliance on Government funds, thereby improving the structure of local government, local responsibility and the local tax base. The distinctive character of Wales should be clearly recognised within such a review;".

The present system was introduced in 1974 as a result of the Local Government Act 1972. It was bitterly resented in many parts of Wales. In my own county of Pembrokeshire, in Montgomeryshire and in Monmouthshire there were protests at the time. Pembrokeshire county council produced a report in 1970 entitled "A unitary authority for Pembrokeshire" which made three points. It recommended:

(i) that all authorities be unitary;
(ii) that the size of authorities be based on population, area and sociological need;
(iii) that existing county boundaries need not, of necessity, be the boundaries for the new authorities."

The Redcliffe-Maud report, the Royal Commission on local government in England in 1969, came out in favour of unitary authorities for England whenever "geographical and other factors allowed".

In Wales, there was a reconsideration by the then Labour Government, who agreed in March 1970 in a White Paper that single unitary authorities for Glamorgan and Monmouthshire could be introduced, but it was not to be so. In 1974, we saw the creation of eight jumbo-sized local county councils in Wales.

There are four main problems with county government in Wales, First, it is too large and cumbersome. The report of the Association of District Councils in 1987 said:

"Certainly, the radical reorganisation of 1974 failed to get the system right in Wales. The 'big is beautiful' argument, popular at that time, was particularly unsuited to the four rural counties of Gwynedd, Dyfed, Powys and Clwyd which make up some 75 per cent. of the Principality in terms of area; and bears no relationship to the ADC view 'that a truly effective and durable system of local government is one which binds democratic institutions and service delivery to identifiable communities'."

Secondly, the county councils are remote from the voters and, indeed, from the councillors. As the Welsh committeee of the national committe of the National Association of Local Councils said:

"The Association believes that the present system has in most areas gone too far in increasing the size of authorities and that the local government system in many places now suffers so severely from the defects of remoteness that any compensating advantages of scale are lost. Particularly in the counties of Dyfed and Gwynedd, distances are so large that councillors in both counties and districts have to travel long distances to meetings and very few of them at any meeting can have a proper local knowledge of the matters under consideration."

Thirdly, the present county boundaries are not coterminous with the natural communities. Redcliffe-Maud in 1969 said:

"Local authority areas should be defined so that they enable citizens and their elected representatives to have a sense of common purpose."

That view was echoed by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executive Officers in its report last year entitled "Local Government of the Future". It argued that natural communities, rather than size, should be consideration for local authorities.

Our 1974 experience has shown that local communities hold together due to historical and other links that are particular to each area, and I believe that it would be sensible for our system of local government to be based on the social structures of communities.

Fourthly, there is confusion among the general public about the roles and services of local authorities. People do not know which authority provides which service, and that is particularly true where there are overlapping responsibilities, such as on questions of social policy, roads and planning. That has been recognised in recent years. The London boroughs and metropolitan districts have become all-purpose authorities and the area health authorities have been abolished, so reducing the number of tiers in the National Health Service.

In Pembrokeshire, we were split from the Dyfed health authority to have our own health authority, and the Secretary of State for the Environment is now looking at the boundaries of Humberside county council. In Scotland, the Conservative party is considering the abolition of the regional tier of government, and in Wales the Labour party has already announced that it wishes to get rid of county councils and to have 24 or 25 all-purpose district councils, albeit with a regional assembly as well. The ADC, in its report "Closer to the People", talking about Wales and the views of the Committee on Welsh District Councils, agrees

"that the paramount goal is the creation of a single tier of most-purpose district authorities which would exercise, either directly or through joint arrangements, all the functions now exercised by district and county councils."

Somebody might say, as Mandy Rice-Davies said, "They would say that, wouldn't they?"

There is further evidence, supported by academic research commissioned by the ADC, by Murray Stewart and Frank Tolan at Bristol university. They, having

looked at Cheshire, came to the conclusion that the transfer of functions in Cheshire was a real and viable option:

"We are convinced now—as we were not at the start of the study—that a move towards a single tier of most purpose authorities is an entirely sensible and indeed important issue for widespread public debate."

Three issues should be at the front of our minds in the reform of local government: it should be democratic and more easily understood, and decision-making should be at the level closest to the people; it should be more cost effective in providing local services to the public and it should be financed from locally controlled sources of revenue; and powers should be decentralised to local government and, when possible, unnecessary controls by central Government should be removed.

I therefore propose in my Bill that we abolish the eight Welsh counties and amalgamate some of the smaller district council areas to create 16 or 17—or, if necessary more, depending on local feeling—all-purpose district councils.

Cardiff would once again become responsible for its own affairs. That would bring back a form of local government similar to the old county boroughs, but larger and without the competing counties surrounding them. For some services like the police, fire services and other emergency services and perhaps for some parts of education, joint committees would be set up composed of members of the constituent authorities. Town and community councils would remain, although I would like to see the Welsh community councils renamed parishes, and an increased role might be possible, especially for the larger parish and town councils.

The Association of District Councils in its report "Closer to the People" concluded:

"A single-tier structure of local government would facilitate accountability and realistic budgeting and eliminate waste. It would minimise bureaucratic duplications inevitably associated with a two-tiered system, thus reducing unproductive overheads. It would provide a tighter management of services and give better value for money to local people."

I believe also that is would be immensely popular with the people of Wales, as it would bring back the historic county names and communities which the Welsh people would recognise.

3.40 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore) *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman seeking to oppose the motion?

Mr. Ray Powell: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I am mindful of the time, effort and energy that hon. Members employ to secure a ten-minute Bill. On several occasions I have presented such Bills, all of which I had hoped would be useful to the country at large. I introduced the Grandparents (Adoption of Children) Bill, which included some measures contained in the present Children Bill. I also recall the Bill to ban opinion polls before general elections and by-elections. That Bill was opposed and was never enacted. However, it would have been useful.

I believe that the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) is no more than a publicity stunt. Obviously he has not bothered to research the subject; he may have something more sinister in mind, such as a running conflict with his county councillors in Dyfed.

Why should the hon. Gentleman introduce a Bill to abolish his county council, especially when county council elections are being held at the moment? That makes me wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has no confidence in his county candidates in his constituency and whether his main aim with this Bill is to abolish them. To propagate this proposal now is very suspect.

Those of us who have been here for the past 20 years since the reorganisation of local government by a Tory Government long before the hon. Member for Pembroke entered politics, who genuinely and profoundly wish to see the real devolution of power from central to regional government, feel outraged that anyone should want to attempt to waste the time of this House by tinkering with such a complex, intricate and emotive subject for whatever reasons. To confine the Bill specifically to Welsh counties complicates maters and infuriates hon. Members on both sides of the House.

From my experience at community council, borough council and county level and from my friendship with county councillors from most parts of Wales, I would respectfully suggest that it would have been far more responsible of the hon. Member for Pembroke if he had presented a Bill to establish a major programme of consultation in all parts of Wales to consider the future of local government, paying particular attention to the differing needs and problems in various areas and clearly undertaking that any change in Welsh local government should proceed only in step with the leading region or regions in England. I must add that I support my Scottish colleagues in their demands for devolution of power to Scotland.

Before the House can even consider supporting the Bill we must ask numerous detailed and probing questions. It is proposed to alter the present local authority functions, but how will they be redistributed in the new dual structure? What Welsh Office function, presently unaccountable, should be given to the unitary authority?

Are there to be further reductions in the Exchequer block grant, or can we expect substantial increases to ensure improvements in local government services to meet the urgent need for industrial modernisation, social change and distinctive cultural development?

The structure of finance begs a series of questions on the right of levy taxex. Should there be an additional Welsh tax or would that be an unacceptable burden on the taxpayer? Would it prove a disincentive in attracting industry and much-needed employment? What limit, if any, should be given to revenue-raising powers, and should there be any limit to the amount or purpose of such expenditure? What machinery should be established to determine the level of rate support grant or its replacement? Should Wales have different financing methods from England?

Those of us who have been born and bred in Wales and have studied the problems of decentralising government, appreciate that we need more than a ten-minute Bill.

Other questions need to be answered. What about the Welsh Office and the Secretary of State for Wales? Only recently the Secretary of State made a statement which showed that he is not in step with the Government, but he has not subscribed to any criticism of them for the past 10 years. Should he have a seat in the Cabinet? I wonder

[Mr. Ray Powell]

whether the occupant of No. 10 is considering that today. How many tiers of Government should we have—regional, unitary authorities, community councils? Who should serve on them? What areas are to be covered? How many Members of Parliament should there be? Do we need a parliamentary constituency reorganisation? Would they be coterminous with the unitary authorities? How would we define the responsibilities of Members of Parliament, regional elected members, unitary authority members and councillors? Most areas of Wales have differing needs. How shall we cater for them if we reform Welsh regional, local and community representative bodies?

All those essential, pertinent, obvious, responsible questions need answers, which need to be well researched and, more importantly, well and truly discussed with our present representatives. Until that happens, and a concentrated and concerted opinion is voiced by the majority of people in Wales, the House has no alternative but to reject any ill-informed, however well-intentioned opinion.

I have many other questions, but the House has a number of matters to deal with which may be more important than the Bill. I ask all hon. Members to join me in the Lobby and reject the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and Nomination of Select Committees at Commencement of Public Business):—

The House divided: Ayes 58, Noes 148.

Division No. 156] **[3.48 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'l's)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Churchill, Mr
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Dover, Den
Evennett, David
Fearn, Ronald
Franks, Cecil
Fry, Peter
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Hayward, Robert
Howells, Geraint
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Killedder, James
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Maclennan, Robert
Mates, Michael
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Rathbone, Tim
Rost, Peter
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon David
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wallace, James
Woodcock, Mike

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Edward Leigh and
Mr. Robert G. Hughes.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Win Griffiths and
Mr. Alan W. Williams.

Question accordingly negatived.

Points of Order

3.59 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you look into the activities of the Secretary of State for Health in treating the House with contempt in relation to his proposed changes to National Health Service hospitals? He is already acting on the basis of his proposed legislation, assuming that it has been passed by the House. But it has been subject to no legislative scrutiny whatsoever.

I have received a letter from Mr. Terry Hunt, the regional general manager of North East Thames regional health authority, stating:

"I am seeking preliminary suggestions for the identification of hospitals . . . to be considered for self-governing status . . . These proposals will be explored with a view to establishing a shortlist of a few hospitals that . . . will be the first to become self-governing."

He asked for the names of hospitals to be considered for inclusion on the initial shortlist to be sent to him no later than 5 May.

I wrote to him saying:

"It seems a negation of the democratic process for you to invite immediate bids for self-governing hospitals under a proposal which has not yet been through Parliament."

I asked him to

"withdraw this letter and recognise that it is not right to anticipate the outcome of the Health legislation. Even if the Government thinks it can ride rough-shod over the democratic process, there is a responsibility for others not to do so".

On 6 April I received a reply saying:

"In this matter we are acting directly on the instructions of the Secretary of State through the Chief Executive of the NHS Management Board."

He is acting directly before the legislation has been considered by the House. The Government are treating Parliament as a rubber stamp. It is an abuse of the parliamentary process and I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look into it.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman raises a highly political matter, which continues what we were discussing yesterday. I have no responsibility for what Ministers say or do. These are matters which legitimately must be taken up in debate across the Floor of the House but not through the Chair.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No point of order can arise on that. What the Secretary of State writes in a letter is not a matter for me.

Mr. Banks: As a member of the Procedure Committee, I know that the report that was published yesterday made it quite clear that one of the reasons for the apparent lowering of parliamentary standards and the running of tempers rather high was the practice adopted by Ministers of making statements outside the House, and effectively circumventing procedures on the Floor of the House. This is yet a further example. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, you should take some interest in the matter.

Mr. Speaker: But we are referring not to a statement but to a letter that the Secretary of State wrote to an hon. Member. It is not a matter for me.

Mr. Banks: The Secretary of State wrote to the health authority.

Mr. Cohen *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a matter of order in the Chamber, it is a matter of political debate, and that is how it should be carried on.

King's Cross Fire (Fennell Report)

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Paul Channon): I beg to move

That this House welcomes the thorough and comprehensive report by Mr. Desmond Fennell QC on the investigation into the King's Cross Underground fire; endorses the Government's commitment to invest in the improvement and modernisation of the Underground and its decision to provide £266m over the next three years for the implementation of the report's recommendations; notes London Regional Transport's constructive response to the report; and looks forward to continuing vigorous action by London Underground to implement its recommendations.

The House will agree that it is right to have a full debate in this House on the Fennell report, but it is also right that it should not have taken place until after London Regional Transport and London Underground had made their formal reply to the report. As the House will know, their reply was published on 6 February and copies were placed in the Library.

The fire at King's Cross Underground station happened on 18 November 1987—more than 16 months ago—but the tragic events of that night are still very much in our minds—and so they should be. The House will not need reminding that the fire resulted in the loss of 31 lives. I know that many are still suffering from the loss of a loved one or were themselves injured and are still trying to come to terms with what happened. I am sure that at least on this I echo the sentiments of the whole House when I once again offer my sympathy to those who have suffered. Also, we must never forget the heroism and sheer professionalism exhibited by many members of the emergency services on that night.

Let me remind the House of the events which followed that terrible tragedy. I appointed an inspector, Mr. Desmond Fennell QC, to carry out a formal investigation. The inquiry sat in public for 91 days, hearing a mass of evidence from 150 witnesses. A number of technical and scientific studies were carried out. I believe that it is generally agreed that Mr. Fennell's report, published on 10 November 1988, when I made a statement to the House, is thorough and comprehensive. It is more than a once-and-for-all prescription for some action to be taken: it calls for continuous vigilance and action, long after the debate has been forgotten.

Mr. Fennell concluded that the fire was caused by a lighted match, which fell through the gap beside the escalator treads and ignited an accumulation of grease and rubbish on the escalator tracks. The fire beneath the escalator spread to the wooden escalator components and then erupted into the booking hall in a flashover. The flashover was attributed to the "trench efect" in which the flames and hot gases are confined within the escalator trench and extend rapidly up it, before bursting upward and outward, at the top of the escalator. This phenomenon, previously unknown, was discovered and explained in the course of the painstaking research commissioned by Mr. Fennell during his work. The message is that nobody responsible for safety can be complacent that all potential hazards have been identified or that the cumulative effect of individually unlikely events can be predicted, let alone ignored.

The report found serious shortcomings within London Regional Transport and London Underground Ltd. which called for a totally new approach to safety management and fire prevention. There were 157 recommendations, the majority of which were directed to LRT or LUL in particular. I accepted the resignations of the senior management and directed the two bodies to institute prompt action. The House will know from their formal reply that the new managements of LRT and LUL have accepted the vast majority of the recommendations which are addressed to them and many have already been implemented. I invite the House to take note of this response as a serious and responsible reaction to the criticisms made.

It would take too long to describe all the measures which are being taken so I shall just summarise the main actions. First, there is the elimination of wooden panelling from escalators. LUL is replacing the wooden skirting boards and balustrades, decking and advertisement panels with metal. I understand that 51 out of the 74 escalators have had their wooden skirting boards and balustrades removed and 23 have had their decking and advertisement panels removed. LUL is also proposing to close temporarily some stations so that this work can be completed by the end of August.

Secondly, there is the introduction of heat detectors and sprinklers beneath escalators. LUL has fitted linear heat detectors and alarm systems to 235 escalators and is aiming to complete the remaining 41 by the end of this month. Smoke detectors have been fitted into 113 escalator machine rooms. Work has now begun on installing sprinklers, and LUL aims to complete this by the end of 1990.

Thirdly, there are to be better below ground radio communication systems available to the emergency services. A VHF radio system has been installed for British Transport police use at 42 Underground stations and it is being enhanced to enable communication with London Underground staff. London Underground, together with the British Transport police and the London fire and civil defence authority, are looking at ways of achieving compatibility with the equipment used by the London Fire Brigade.

Fourthly, there was to be enhanced emergency training for station staff. Station staff now receive fire and safety training every six months. Management and supervisory staff also receive regular refresher training in controlling station emergencies. Fifthly, there was to be liaison with the fire brigade, including joint exercises. These now take place twice yearly. Sixthly, there was to be closer monitoring of statistics and formal reporting up of incident investigations to ensure that trends were identified and action taken. Reports are now considered at director level.

Hon Members have expressed concern about the safety implications of the Underground ticketing system. This was addressed in the Fennell report, which recommended that there should be a review of the proposals. The House will know that the London Underground has recently discovered that in certain circumstances, if one phase of the three-phase power supply system fails, not all the gates will open automatically. London Underground is taking steps to eliminate that remote possibility and should

complete the work by the end of June. London Regional Transport has, at our suggestion, appointed independent consultants to carry out the review. It should be completed by the end of April. I shall inform the House of the review's findings and I shall ensure that prompt action will be taken if necessary.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Secretary of State aware just how deeply unpopular the new barriers are to the travelling public in London? It is not just a question of them not opening up in an emergency, as we were given to understand they would. It is that access itself is difficult even if all the barriers are completely open, because they restrict the movement of people throughout the station. Has the Secretary of State gone round and seen for himself what happens at Westminster, for example, at rush hour in the morning?

Mr. Channon: Both my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport and I have seen the Underground ticketing system in operation. I accept that it is unpopular with some of the travelling public at this stage, although one cannot estimate how many, and I accept that the unfamiliarity of the system makes it unpopular. However, similar systems have been introduced in many underground systems round the world; I have a full list of those countries if the House is interested. The claims that the barriers are inherently unsafe are not shared by the London fire brigade or the railways inspectorate.

Mr. Terry Fields (Liverpool, Broadgreen): That is not the case.

Mr. Channon: That is not my view alone, but the view of the London Fire brigade and the railways inspectorate, which are more likely to be expert than the hon. Gentleman or myself.

Whatever views the House may have about the opinions of the London fire brigade or the railways inspectorate, the important point is that consultants are considering the operation of the system. We shall have their report at the end of the month, the House will be able to study the findings and then we shall have to decide on an appropriate course of action.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that one of the central reasons for introducing the barriers in the first place, other than increasing the number of exits, was to tackle fraud, which is estimated to total £25 million, all of which falls on the rail users?

Mr. Channon: My hon. Friend makes an important point. My hon. Friend the Minister will deal with the matter in more detail, if the House wants to go into the questions, when we have heard the comments of other hon. Members.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The public are upset about the barriers not only because they are an inconvenience, but because they are viewed as serious safety risks. The Secretary of State has made the excuse that consultants are being brought in and that a report will be issued shortly. Why did the Secretary of State not stop the installation programme when he agreed to consultants being appointed to look at the safety aspects? Why are yet more barriers being installed while the safety aspects are being considered? If the Government were really interested in safety, they would have stopped that installation programme.

Mr. Channon: Mr. Fennell made no suggestion that that should be done. The hon. Gentleman's view, which has also been expressed by other hon. Members, that the Underground ticketing system is unsafe is not shared. Let us wait for the consultants' report. It is evident that the system is, in some ways, likely to enhance safety. The gates, which are made to spring open in emergencies, replace fencing and one or two-manned opening's. Evacuation will be easier in some circumstances. The introduction of gates and ticket machines is often accompained by the redesign of the ticket hall to provide an open area less prone to congestion, and in some stations the barriers will release ticket controllers to give advice and assistance and to look out for problems.

Mr. Terry Fields: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Channon: No, I shall not.

Mr. Fields: This is an important point.

Mr. Channon: I must press on. I have already given way three times.

The House will express its views, and hon. Members will hear what the consultants say at the end of April.

The Fennell report highlighted the need for London Regional Transport and London Underground to examine their management structures and introduce an effective and continuing audit of safety. I welcome the establishment of the new safety audit committee, together with the safety services directorate. I am sure that the House would agree that it is absolutely vital to get a new safety culture. To do that, we must get the new structures right. Further changes may well be required in the future as the new management, under the chairmanship of Mr. Newton, who was appointed only last month, get further to grips with its task.

The safety audit committee established by London Regional Transport will monitor the safety of operation of all the subsidiary companies. The committee reports direct to the LRT board. It is chaired by a non-executive board member. In addition, a safety audit unit has been established within LRT to administer the safety monitoring process.

London Underground has established a safety committee which meets monthly. That committee is also chaired by a non-executive member with a special interest in safety. That director has direct access to the chairman of London Regional Transport. These measures will ensure that any concerns about safety on the Underground can be made known at the very top of LRT. The committee has a wide range of functions, including safety and fire prevention, safety audit reports, as well as reviewing the underground's safety performance in relation to other similar undertakings or industries.

London Underground has also established a safety services unit, which includes a group of safety auditors and advisers, each with a particular speciality, and a safety programmes unit which provides a central focal point for the overall management and co-ordination of its reply to the recommendations of the Fennell report.

[Mr. Channon]

The lessons from Fennell go wider than just London Underground. Thirty of the recommendations were directed at the emergency services or Government Departments.

On 10 November, I made it clear in my statement that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would be making regulations under section 12 of the Fire Precaution Act 1971, specifying fire precautions arrangements for Underground stations. The House will know, or it will wish to know if it does not already, that the consultation process on those regulations is now at an advanced stage and that my right hon. Friend intends to lay them next month. The regulations will encompass a number of Mr. Fennell's recommendations, above all those for the installation of heat detectors and sprinklers in escalators and other areas of high fire risk, for the protection and maintenance of exits so that all of them, including ticket barriers, can be immediately opened, and for the training and provision of staff so that, in an emergency, they know what to do and are there to do it.

I also told the House on 10 November 1988 that the railway inspectorate, with support from the Health and Safety Executive will be conducting a special investigation of London Undergound's safety management systems. This debate gives me the chance to report progress. The study team has now completed its field work and written an early draft of its report. I understand from the Chief Inspecting Officer of Railways that further analysis is going well and that the aim is to produce the final text by the end of this month. The report will be published. I have no doubt that any study of that kind is bound to produce important lessons. As the House would expect, I shall want any such lessons acted upon promptly and vigorously.

I now refer to the railway inspectorate. The House will know from the response of my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport to a question by the hon. Member for Truro, (Mr. Taylor) on 13 March that, following a successful recruitment campaign, the inspectorate is now almost at full strength. Only two vacancies remain, and I expect them to be filled within the next couple of months. The chief inspecting officer has been carrying out a review of his staffing resources to see what further manpower needs are necessary in the light of the inspectorate's enhanced health and safety role recommended by Mr. Fennell. Meanwhile, as an interim measure, five additional inspectors are being recruited. The interviewing of candidates has just finished. We shall, of course, be sympathetic to any request for a further strengthening of the railway inspectorate.

I have heard Opposition Members allege that the Government's policies have led LRT to reduce its expenditure on safety. Those allegations are wrong and I reject them.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): That point is central to some of the comments that have been made. When I was a member of the GLC's London transport committee, the capital expenditure projections by the GLC at the time and its projections for further expenditure were substantially less than the amounts that have been spent by the Government. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that capital expenditure now is 60 per cent. higher than was envisaged by the GLC?

Mr. Channon: I think that my hon. Friend is right. It is a fact that in every year since 1984 London Regional Transport has been able to spend, more in real terms, on capital investment. As my hon. Friend has just said, in the year that has just finished, London Regional Transport had authority to spend around 60 per cent. more, in real terms, on capital investment than it spent in 1984-85—the last year of GLC funding.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): Is it not right to say that the Government turned down an application from the GLC and reduced its capital expenditure allocation by one third? What the Secretary of State is making a comparison with is not what the GLC wanted to do, by way of capital expenditure, but what the Government allowed it to do.

Mr. Channon: The hon. Member is rather changing the tune—we have not heard that particular argument before. In the past, the argument was that we were spending an inadequate amount on capital investment. Whatever were the merits or demerits of GLC control of London Underground, 60 per cent. more, in real terms, is being spent on capital investment than was spent in the last year of GLC funding. LRT's spending level of £365 million —£1 million a day—was agreed before the King's Cross fire. That £365 million is the totality, not just the figure for London Underground.

The only point that I am making is that there is no question of the Government's starving LRT or the Underground of the funds it needed before the fire. Indeed, experience has shown that, in the past, they have not been able to spend some of the resources allocated to them by the Government.

Mr. Tony Banks: We ought to get the facts correct. It is quite clear that it was the Government who stopped the GLC putting capital investment into the Underground system. The GLC wanted to spend £669 million on transport in 1983-84, but the Government accepted expenditure of only £461 million—capital and revenue.

Mr. Channon: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is getting so excited about this.

Mr. Banks: We want the truth.

Mr. Channon: I am telling the truth. I am giving the facts of capital investment. What interpretation the hon. Gentleman puts upon what I am saying is a matter of dispute between the two sides of this House. My recollection is that the GLC had plenty of money to spend on subsidising fares, but never had any money for capital investment in the Underground. That is the reality of the situation. The money that was available was spent on reducing fares, but no money was spent on the long-term health of the Underground, and that is something for which the GLC will be condemned. *[Interruption.]* Well, it is true.

Mr. Fennell's report on this tragic fire explicitly states:

"In my judgment there is no evidence that the overall level of subsidy available to London Regional Transport was inadequate to finance necessary safety-related spending and maintain safety standards. I accept the evidence of the most senior management in London Regional Transport and London Underground that if funds were needed, funds were available. There does, however, remain the question of how the available resources were allocated and used by London Underground."

Mr. Terry Fields: When we talk about what Fennell had to say, we are getting to the nub of this matter. Fennell said also that the board put more emphasis on performance and profits than on human safety. The avoidable and unnecessary death of my comrade, Station Officer Townsley and others is down to the board and down to this Government—on a par with the spirit of the Herald of Free Enterprise.

Mr. Channon: I do not agree with all that the hon. Gentleman says, but I do understand the strength of his feelings about this matter, which he has expressed on many occasions. I am coming on to refer to Fennell's view about the climate that he found in London Underground at the time of the inquiry. His report makes it clear that, sadly, London Underground and LRT had allowed a climate to develop in which safety was not given the priority we should all have wished it to take. The point I am making is that, in his view, the resources that had been made available had been misallocated.

There is now an entirely new management at the top of London Underground, and the climate has changed completely. Fennell exposed major weaknesses, which are being attacked. LRT has made an estimate of the cost of implementation of Fennell's recommendations—some £266 million over the next three years. We have made full provision for that amount, but that is not the end of the matter. That is the point that I want to emphasise to the House again and again. Safety must remain the No. 1 and continuing priority of LRT and the Underground. I am sure that problems will continue to be identified in due course. No doubt we shall have shock-horror stories all over again. If we get them, we shall ensure that London Underground deals effectively and speedily with any new problems that may arise. I want to make it clear, as I have in the past, that finance will not be a barrier to implementing the Fennell recommendations or any additional safety measures that may be identified in due course.

In my view—I think the House will agree—safety includes protection against crime, which is becoming a worrying fact of life on London Underground. As the House knows, the Government published a report in 1986 on "Crime on the London Underground" and provided £15 million additional finance to LUL to implement it.

We also agreed an increase in the complement of the Underground division of the British transport police from 280 to 350 officers and we agreed last year on the recommendation from Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary to an increase in the division's complement by a further 50 officers.

The additional funding has financed the inauguration of an Underground police radio network recognised by the 1986 report as

"the single most effective aid to improving the efficiency of Underground policing"

—and by the Fennell report as an essential facility.

The additional funding has also supported the setting up of new area police stations to allow extension of the home beat policing system commended by the inspector for its effectiveness in the Stockwell area, where the number of robberies has fallen in each of the last three years to half the 1985 figure—contrary to the rising trend elsewhere. New area offices are being opened at Finsbury Park, Wembley Park and Hammersmith. These are important steps, and they are producing results, but the level of crime is far too high and the rising trend of violent crime throughout the system worrying. We shall continue to make combating crime a priority and I shall keep the matter under constant review.

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Channon: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, because I have already given way about 15 times and think that I should press on—*[Interruption.]* I even gave way to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) so perhaps the House will allow me to get on a little further.

Mr. Tony Banks: We love you for it.

Mr. Channon: Thank you so much—*[Laughter.]* I am not sure that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) does.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I love you.

Mr. Terry Fields: This is a serious matter.

Mr. Channon: Yes, it is indeed serious.

The Government have recognised the central role and strategic importance of the Underground in keeping London moving and sustaining economic growth. Major improvements are needed in the London Underground system to improve safety, to relieve congestion, to modernise the system, and to provide additional capacity to cope with the future increase in demand.

We must not forget this is the oldest underground railway system in the world and the measures required are expensive; the reconstruction of one station alone, Angel, which many hon. Members know, cost £40 million. That is why we have given approval to yet another significant real increase in the capital expenditure for the Underground in 1989-90—about twice as high in real terms as in 1984-85—to allow LRT to embark on a range of major upgrading projects, including many measures to reduce congestion in stations and on trains.

However, more will need to be done. The central London rail study has identified the need for a major upgrading programme to relieve congestion on the Underground and on Network SouthEast and I shall be taking decisions later this year on the need for new lines through central London to cater for the future. The east London rail study will also shortly be reporting on the best options for improving rail access from central London to docklands and east Thames-side.

Of course I accept that the Underground is congested and that much needs to be done to improve the quality of service. Substantial sums will have to be invested, and I am determined that that will happen. Inevitably, when the investments are made, while the improvements are under way, passengers will suffer some inconvenience, but passengers will not suffer in vain.

It is my intention that London travellers should eventually enjoy a safe, efficient and high quality Underground system. That should be the wider context for this debate and it defines the challenging task now facing Mr. Newton and the new management in LRT. I have given him a clear remit, published on 22 March, establishing that safety is the highest priority, followed by the need to provide for the projected increase in traffic on the Underground and to docklands and the need to improve the quality of services and security afforded to the traveller.

[Mr. Channon]

All of us know that those who experienced or suffered in this tragedy will never forget what happened—nor must we forget it, on whichever side of the House we sit. The right measures must be taken. We must ensure that this kind of tragedy is never allowed to happen again, and we must do everything in our power to try to avert it. We owe that to those who lost their lives. I have described the positive steps that LRT and LUL have taken to ensure that safety receives the highest priority. I emphasise again that I am sure that more will need to be done. Everyone involved must continue to view safety as the number one objective.

Mr. Fennell's report ultimately contains a vital message for all large organisations, whether or not they are in the transport field, that safety must be one of the top priorities of management. I am determined to play my part in fulfilling that objective for the industries for which I am responsible. I hope that the House will recognise that Mr. Fennell's report has set in hand a necessary change of perspective within London Regional Transport and London Underground. I am convinced that it will be a lasting change, and I am determined that it shall be.

The Opposition have put down an amendment. I assume, therefore, that we shall be asked to divide at the end of the debate. That is a pity, but that is for the Opposition to decide. Whatever division there may be on the point on which the Opposition base the amendment, the clear and united message from the House should be that we demand that safety must be paramount in all questions of this kind. If we implement it effectively, the Fennell report will ensure a lasting change of attitude in London Regional Transport and London Underground to the benefit of future and present travellers on the system. That is something that the Government are determined to achieve. I ask the House to support me in that aim.

4.30 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates Mr. Desmond Fennell QC and his assessors on the report into the investigation into the King's Cross Underground fire on 18th November 1987, particularly the scientific skill shown by the personnel of the Health and Safety Executive Laboratory at Buxton in discovering the new phenomenon of the trench effect; expresses its deepest sympathy to the relatives of the 31 people who died in this terrible tragedy; endorses Mr. Fennell's tribute to all members of the public, London Underground staff and emergency staff who helped others, especially Station Officer Townsley and Police Constable Hanson; looks forward to the urgent implementation, by both the Government and London Underground, of all the report's recommendations; but regrets the fact that Mr. Fennell ruled as ultra vires any consideration of the role that the funding of London Underground may have played in the circumstances leading up to this terrible disaster."

At last we have this debate, 16 months after the fire, five months after the publication of the report and four months after the debate in another place. The amendment makes clear our point of view on the matter. We congratulate Desmond Fennell and all those associated with producing the report. We express our appreciation for their analysis and conclusions. We record our deepest sympathy to the relatives of the 31 people who died and to those who are still suffering from the trauma. We state our admiration for the emergency services, the public and the London Underground staff who played a major part in the rescue. We pay tribute especially to the contribution of Police Constable Hanson and of Fire Officer Townsley, who died a hero's death.

We are impressed by the Health and Safety Executive laboratory at Buxton for its painstaking scientific research into the trench effect of a new fire dynamic, something that we have learnt much about, which means that many people will have to change their traditional thinking on fire. We congratulate the personnel of the Health and Safety Executive. I am sure that all hon. Members endorse the view that much credit is due to them.

Like the Secretary of State, we look forward to all the recommendations in the report being implemented as soon as possible; on that I think that there will be unanimous agreement in the House. However, one substantial reservation is identified in the amendment. We regret Mr. Fennell's decision to rule as ultra vires any consideration of the role of the funding of London Underground in the circumstances that led to the fire. We believe that that decision was wrong. Indeed, the Secretary of State made it clear in correspondence that we have had on the terms of reference for other tragedies on the railway system that the terms of reference are traditional and should have allowed anything to be considered. It was only the judgment of Mr. Fennell that the matter should be ultra vires. Therefore, he refused to accept evidence on that point. That was an extraordinary decision. The Secretary of State claimed some support for the view that it had no role in the circumstances leading to the fire. It was curious for Mr. Fennell, a barrister, to decide that he would not hear evidence on the part that funding played.

In chapter 2, paragraph 14, of his report, Mr. Fennell stated:

"This Investigation had only one goal: to ascertain the cause of the tragedy and to try and ensure that it will never happen again."

We all agree with that; indeed, that point was made by the Secretary of State.

We are in common agreement about the cause of the fire. The analysis is clear about the circumstances that led to the fire. There is a unanimous acceptance of the cause of the fire; that the fire was on an escalator at King's Cross, that the accumulation of grease and dust became the seedbed for the fire, that it was ignited by a lighted match from a smoker who continued to defy the ban on smoking, and that fire incidents were not uncommon. A number of previous inquiries over recent years have recorded similar incidents and recommendations, which were not implemented, and which were ignored by London Regional Transport and London Underground. The wilful neglect of the use of water fog systems, due to cost considerations, contributed to the horror of a new concept in fire dynamics —the trench effect. The trench effect caused a massive flame-thrower effect that led to the considerable death and destruction.

As in all tragedies—as anyone who is concerned especially with safety will know—a combination of smaller incidents came together to contribute to the tragedy. It was a combination of inadequacies, each of them small enough in themselves but combining to make the tragedy so much worse. For example, as Mr. Fennell points out, there was no one with overall responsibility for safety in London Regional Transport. A system for training staff on fire drill and evacuation was not evident. Anyone who has spent a

considerable period at sea—or who is familiar with the legislation of the House—will know of the continual fire training that must be carried out on ships, and the important part that that plays when the time comes to deal with an emergency, especially with a fire.

The staff of London Underground were unco-ordinated and haphazard in their reactions to the fire. There were poor communications and, indeed, the very operations room was unstaffed, and had been unstaffed since 1984, due to the cuts in staff implemented by the London Regional Transport Board. There was an ambiguous interpretation of fire legislation and certification that was to apply to all the Underground system.

There has been some controversy about the role of the GLC, but from Mr. Fennell's report it becomes increasingly clear that the issue of fire certification was a matter of dispute between the Secretary of State's Department and his inspectorate and, indeed, the fire brigade and the GLC. The GLC wanted to treat all the Underground system as being subject, in law, to fire regulations. The people who opposed it on that issue were the Government, the inspectorate and London Underground. I shall return to that point a little later, because it raises the issue of the inspectorate—for which the Secretary of State is responsible—which must have received the greatest indictment of its operations of any inspectorate in this country at any time.

There is ample evidence in the report about the roles of the various bodies concerned. The railway inspectorate was undermanned, insufficiently resourced, confused as to its responsibilities, had no proper liaison with the London fire brigade and was too informal with the management of London Underground. I am bound to say that those have been common criticisms of the inspectorate in the Department of Transport going back many, many years, even before the Secretary of State had taken over the responsibilities of that Department.

In Mr. Fennell's report there is ample evidence to support all the conclusions. The 157 recommendations will undoubtedly, if implemented, effect radical improvements to safety, which all of us in the House want to see.

As the Secretary of State has said, the report will not only affect London Underground. To the good and to the credit of Mr. Fennell's report, I am aware of many publicly and privately owned industries that have made a special examination of the report and are considering what they can learn from it in dealing with similar incidents. Other Departments, especially the Home Office, which is heavily involved in fire certification, other underground railways —for instance, Glasgow and Tyneside—and those concerned with the Channel tunnel will learn a lot from the Fennell report. Increasingly, concerns are being raised about the safety of the Channel tunnel, especially by the fire brigade and others. I would like to meet the Secretary of State to discuss the Channel tunnel, because of the decisions soon to be taken.

Special sections in the report challenge the whole ethos of management about safety. The report also changes the approach of management, employees and Government to safety. It raises an important issue that I am constantly raising—the public's right to know. The people who travel on our transport system have a right to know what is being done in the name of safety. They have a right to know about the stability of a ferry, about safety on the Underground and the age of an aircraft. People do not believe that everything has to be done in secret and the events of the last few years convinces them that the right decisions are not being taken.

I am glad to see that Mr. Fennell supports the principle that the public have a right to know. That is spelled out in his report because paragraph 21 of chapter 19 says:

> "The travelling public have a right to know about the safety arrangements made by transport operators and the safety of places in which they habitually gather."

That principle needs to be spelled out more and more in our debates about transport.

The question, "Who is responsible and what circumstances led to the fire?" is still being asked. It is clear that the role of management was thoroughly examined by Mr. Fennell. It is also clear that under legislation management's responsibility is spelled out. As has often been said in the House, it has the responsibility for managing the London Underground economically, efficiently and safely. Those are management's obligations. However, greater attention has been paid to economy and efficiency than to safety and that is shown by correspondence between earlier Secretaries of State and London Regional Transport.

I note that the Secretary of State now says in his terms of reference to Mr. Newton, whom we wish well in his job of improving safety, that safety is now the top priority. That is written out specifically and disposes of the argument that a statutory obligation is sufficient. The Secretary of State has made it clear that safety in the operation of the system is fundamental. That poses the question how we are to achieve that and how it will come about.

It is clear that management failed to observe the many warnings about fires, believing that it could live with them rather than take preventive action. In the appendices to the report it is said that of 49 fires on escalators, 35 were due to smoking materials. If anybody reads the case history at the back of the report he will see that it predicts almost exactly what happened in this case. It was a different form of fire, the trench effect that we now know about, but the cause of the fire is made clear in all the reports that made recommendations, all of which were constantly ignored. Apparently they were ignored not only by London Regional Transport but by the inspectorate. I shall come to that matter later. Management failed to observe the warnings, to employ sufficient staff or to ensure that they had proper training.

It is right that the people responsible should pay the penalty, although I am not sure whether they were sacked or resigned. I was often sacked from shipping companies but I never got a year's or six month's pay. If I had, I would not have understood that to be a sacking. Thousands of workers would love to get the sack if it meant getting half a year's pay. People carried out the obligations placed on them by the Secretary of State and that is why they have not been sacked. If they had failed to carry out that obligation they would have been sacked. That is one of the issues that we must address.

Until that fateful night, on the criteria established by the Government, Dr. Bright and Mr. Ridley were major successes in the eyes of the Government. They were ahead of schedule in the plan to cut costs and reduce taxpayers' subsidies. They had achieved the objectives of section 16 of the Act of 1984 when London Regional Transport was taken over from the GLC. One of the primary aims was the reaching of financial targets. The terms of reference given

[Mr. John Prescott]

to London Regional Transport on 20 July 1984 placed much emphasis on efficiency and cutting costs. That was made clear by the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewksbury (Mr. Ridley).

The then Secretary of State told Mr. Bright—I should call him Dr. Bright, although he is now Sir Keith Bright; the man even got knighted. He must have been reasonably successful to have got knighted by the Government. He must have carried out his obligations, and these are the tasks he was given:

"You have told me that you can achieve a reduction in unit costs of 2·5 per cent. per year in real terms. Over the next few years I look to you, if possible, to do better than that, and I shall want to review the target with you."

He was set to cut the passenger revenue support level by half in two years. In the event, the revenue support level of £190 million inherited from the GLC was reduced to £90 million in one year. He was ahead of time, and no doubt that influenced the knighthood.

In those circumstances, while extra income came from passenger revenue—we can debate that later—the greater proportion had to be found in other ways. Taking the contribution of revenue and capital together, the amount of saving to the taxpayer and the ratepayer, or the Government, was about £200 million.

There is much talk about the way in which the Government have cut revenue support. This country has the only transport system in Europe that runs without revenue support. On average, the rate of support is 50 to 80 per cent. in most other European systems and, by common accord, they have safer and better quality services than we have. Clearly, it remains an issue of judgment between the two sides of the House as to how much revenue support should be given. We must bear in mind that we are attempting to run our transport system on far less than any other transport system in Europe.

As we require an extra £100 million to £200 million, what constraints are being put on the system? What cuts must be made and what is the quality of those cuts? Are they affecting the level of safety, administration and training? We are aware of the conclusion that Mr. Fennell reached about the overall level of subsidy available to LRT —the Secretary of State has quoted it often enough. In his view, there was no shortage of subsidy. To be fair to the right hon. Gentleman, I should quote Mr. Fennell's words, which appear in chapter 19, paragraph 3:

"In my judgement there is no evidence that the overall level of subsidy available to London Regional Transport was inadequate to finance necessary safety-related spending and maintain safety standards."

I note that those words appear in chapter 19 rather than in the analysis. Chapter 19 is headed, "Matters for further consideration". That issue should certainly receive further consideration because of the refusal to receive any evidence on the point. I have never witnessed such a startling conclusion, considering that it was not backed by evidence.

Indeed, on reading the report one comes across many examples of staff cuts and cuts in resources, all of which affected the level of safety. To be fair, it says that it is an issue for further consideration. The Secretary of State has ducked behind that conclusion, as if there had been a powerful examination of the case. There has not been such an examination, and his conclusion does not even appear in the section of the report that would have dealt with such an examination. It is simply there "for further consideration".

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): If what the hon. Gentleman says is right, why did counsel for the National Union of Railwaymen accept that the fire was not as a result of inadequate investment in the Underground?

Mr. Prescott: I am not prepared to accept the hon. Gentleman's assertion that that was accepted by the union. I am talking about the Fennell report and its conclusions. The evidence is examined and conclusions are reached. I am challenging the Secretary of State's conclusion when he ducked behind the argument that it was not due to a shortage of resources. He also said that he considered it to be ultra vires. As I have said in the past, we do not consider that to be an acceptable proposition. We disagree with it. It is a subject for debate.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend's response to the intervention by the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot). It is not just a matter of capital but of the pressure on necessitous revenue in relation to safety matters.

Although Mr. Fennell heard from one of the parties that there was a case relating to the prevailing economic climate and Government directives, that was dismissed at the stage when it was put. Later, a witness said that, as a result of the economic climate, various schemes were not put forward. Does my hon. Friend feel that at that stage Mr. Fennell might have reconsidered his decision about taking more evidence after hearing that witness?

Mr. Prescott: I am glad that my hon. Friend raised that point as that was the next point that I was coming to. It flows from chapter 19. If the Secretary of State had read further through chapter 19, but ignored what the managers were saying, he should at least have challenged the judgment of Mr. Fennell. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) said, the reduction in revenue support is very important.

If the Secretary of State had read on in chapter 19, he would have read about Mr. Sykes who had to make a judgment about escalator investment. Mr. Sykes was asked why the wooden cladding was not replaced, because many of the inquiry reports had pointed out that wooden cladding on an escalator made a fire much more difficult to handle once the rubbish underneath the escalator had been ignited. Report after report recommended that the cladding should be replaced, and escalators cleared. The obvious question then is why the cladding was not replaced. Mr. Sykes believed that

"There was a feeling among London Underground managers that the financial climate would rule out proposals to increase spending in certain areas."

That was the judgment of Mr. Sykes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Mr. Styles."] I am sorry. I meant to say Mr. Styles.

Mr. Styles, the lift and escalator manager, said that the relocation of the water fog controls or the replacement of wooden escalators "stood a thin chance" of being implemented. Mr. Styles had to make requests to the board to replace the wooden panels. He had the backing of the inquiry reports. All the evidence was that the

number of fires was increasing, but he felt that he could not make his application even though it was clear what was necessary.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Did not Mr. Styles have to have an excuse for doing nothing?

Mr. Prescott: I cannot understand the hon. Gentleman's question. I am not sure whether it was offensive. Mr. Styles is still employed by London Regional Transport. He had read the reports and he felt that in the interests of passenger safety something should be done about the wooden cladding. Who can deny that something should have been done about that cladding after the accident? The fact that the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) made such a silly comment shows that he does not understand the problems of safety on the Underground and he throws doubt on a man who was desperately trying to remove materials on our escalators which contributed to the fire and which played such a tragic role in the terrible loss of life at King's Cross. The hon. Member for Twickenham should re-think what he has said.

The wooden cladding was not replaced because of the financial climate and the budget for escalator cleaning was reduced. The Secretary of State would be aware of that if he has examined the figures. One third of the cleaning staff were sacked despite all the reports about dirty material in the escalators which caused fires. It was known that cigarettes and matches caused fires, so smoking was banned. However, the logic presumably was that as there were to be no matches, the dirty material did not matter. That assumption was fatally wrong.

The risers stopped discarded matches from reaching the dirt on the escalators. However, as people were denied the right to smoke on trains, they simply began smoking on the escalators. That is why there were more and more fires on the escalators. The inquiries highlighted the water fogging equipment. Why was that equipment not used to dampen the dirty material? When management was asked why the water fogging equipment was not used, the answer was that it caused corrosion and there were cost considerations.

I accept that those material factors should be taken into account. However, the management reduced staff by more than 3,000 because that is the traditional way to cut costs. It is important that we consider what kind of workers were lost. The man in the control room lost his job, and he was not there to handle the fire. From 1984, cleaners, inspectors and trainers lost their jobs. Those people are supposed to play a part in improving the safety ethos about which the Secretary of State is now convinced.

There was a crucial absence of adequately trained staff on the six tube line platforms at King's Cross. In 1984 the Oxford Circus fire report reached the same conclusions as those in the Fennell report. However, did that stop LRT reducing the number of staff at stations? No, it did not because there was a desire to reduce costs as there was not sufficient money.

The station inspector post was withdrawn from the operations room and that was left unmanned. Mr. Fennell criticised that. Those cuts are a consequence of cutting revenue support from £190 million in 1984-85 to £45 million in 1987-88.

I presume that LRT will face a demand that there must be a 7 per cent. return on investment. I believe that that requirement applies even to the escalators. I wonder whether the Secretary of State, with his £260 million, can tell us whether all the escalators have been subjected to the Treasury rule of 7 per cent. rate of return—which I believe will be 8 per cent. after last week. I do not know how we can have a 7 per cent. return on capital investment on an escalator. That is a stupidity which affects the whole level of safety on London Underground. To add to that stupidity, the Treasury increased the 7 per cent. demand to 8 per cent. last week.

On 18 November, "Tubeline", an LRT publication, reported Mr. Jeff Allen, the LRT finance director, as saying

> "The Directors consider it important that the company show its owners and paymasters it can keep proper control of spending."

He then went on to boast of cuts in recruitment of a further £1·3 million, £800,000 on maintenance—which meant that more cleaners' jobs would be lost—cuts of £40,000 in training and even £400,000 on electricity, which presumably means that the trains went slower.

When was that report about cost savings published? It was published on 18 November, the day of the King's Cross fire. Mr. Fennell now claims that all the areas where LRT was saving money were contributory factors, which meant that people's efforts to deal with the tragedy were inadequate. That is the connection between costs and safety. That is what affects the ethos of safety. Money is what matters.

Have things really changed? That is the important question now. The Government have £260 million. Basically the Government are simply giving back the money which they have robbed from LRT in the form of public revenue support. I assume that the Secretary of State now believes that that money should have been spent before. That money will not be spent on new areas. Why was the money not spent on these areas before? LRT believed it could get away with it. The Government are providing money now to pay for something which could have been done a long time ago. However, the Treasury wanted to make it clear that it wanted to save money and get rid of revenue support. The Treasury is moving towards removing capital support because it wants to privatise LRT. As the Secretary of State so proudly proclaimed at his press conference, privatisation is the way forward for the railway system.

The subsidising policy is questionable. I join the Secretary of State in wishing Mr. Newton well. The managers are trying to change the whole ethos of safety and to introduce a safety audit. I wish Mr. Newton well in that. The progress report contains positive responses to the recommendations and I welcome that.

However, subsequent discussions that I have had with LRT have raised some concerns. It rejects recommendation 36 which recommended the replacement of wooden risers. I notice that the Secretary of State did not mention that point when he referred to escalators. The wooden risers contributed to the trench effect. The proposal was rejected because it would cost a lot more money to replace the wooden risers.

Why are cigarette kiosks still allowed to sell cigarettes and matches on platforms? The answer is that LRT will not find the money to buy them out. They continue to sell matches and cigarettes on the Underground despite this terrible tragedy.

[Mr. Prescott]

What about the regular fire practices? Mr. Fennell made it clear that there should be a fire practice on the Underground every six months. I do not believe that there has been one so far. A request from the fire authority to conduct such a practice was met with the response from LRT that it did not want to hold one during busy times because it would inconvenience passengers.

That attitude is not acceptable, particularly after the report. Of course passengers should be involved in such exercises. They give them a sense of security. Instead, London Regional Transport is feeding the old-fashioned view that passengers should not be told in case they panic. That view must be pushed out of London Regional Transport. That is particularly important given the incidence of fires. Last year there were over 4,000—11 a day. There were 135—more than two a week—on escalators. Many of those fires required the fire brigade, and that is since the incident.

The railway inspectorate's role is crucial. The Secretary of State is directly responsible for that department. Mr. Fennell makes it clear that checking and monitoring is vital to enforce the law. In chapter 18 he says that the railway inspectorate was mistaken in its interpretation of the law and its responsibilities. There were insufficient resources, staff shortages and a lack of vigour. There was a cut from three quarters of one person in 1984 to one quarter of one person in 1987, and no proper liaison with the fire brigade. The railway inspectorate had to admit that, after 1984, it stopped receiving the fire brigade's reports. It did not even want to hear about fires on the Underground. Its relationship with the London Underground "lacked creative tension." That is another way of saying that it was too damn cosy.

The report refers to the registered application of fire certifications for the Underground. The inspectorate led the fight against certification for the Underground—now accepted—and lined up with London Underground against the GLC and the fire brigade's recommendation. That is made clear in chapter 18 which says:

"I believe their general relationship with London Underground lacked the creative tension necessary to instil discipline and produce prompt results within the organisation. A more vigorous use of enforcement powers would probably have alerted London Underground senior management to the unsatisfactory state of affairs in stations sooner, and produced general improvements in housekeeping standards. The degree of liaison and co-operation with the London Fire Brigade was insufficient and the decision to stop receiving copies of fire inspection reports was wrong."

That is a long quotation but it is crucial to put it on the record. It is the most massive indictment that I have ever heard of a safety body which the Government claim is independent under their own legislation but is under the influence and shares the priorities of the Department of Transport, obsessed with saving money.

Who is the railway inspectorate responsible to? I have looked at the agency agreement——

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I well recall the incident in relation to the GLC to which the hon. Gentleman is referring. I do not disagree with the thrust of what he is saying in terms of the necessity for fire safety certificates but, before we build the GLC's attitude on such matters into something that it was not, will he confirm that the discussion and the correspondence with the GLC related only to the Heathrow Underground station?

Mr. Prescott: That is a fair point to which my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) will refer later. The inspectorate was referring to the Heathrow station, which it called a hole in the ground, not a building. The report goes into all the arguments because Mr. Fennell asked for a report on that matter, but at the end of the day it was not applied to the rest of the Underground system which we are now considering. My hon. Friend will deal with that later.

I have looked at the agency agreement between the inspectorate and the Health and Safety Executive. It is clear that the Health and Safety Executive paid the Secretary of State for his inspectors. If I were the Health and Safety Executive I would be asking for my money back because the Department did not carry out its responsibilities as identified by Mr. Fennell. The Secretary of State is directly responsible for the railway inspectorate. He often shuffles responsibilities on to other people in all sorts of areas, but he is directly responsible for the railway inspectorate's actions.

Mr. Fennell says that this terrible tragedy was foreseeable and that important warnings were ignored. Safety suffered because of the management's obsession with reducing taxpayers' costs to the detriment of all other considerations. The railway inspectorate lacked the staff, resources, motivation and independence to enforce the law and bring London Underground to account. The management has paid the price by resignation.

The Government are the only body who have not been brought to account for their role. Yet the Secretary of State is responsible to Parliament for the railway inspectorate and for London Regional Transport and London Underground. The Secretary of State set the financial climate in which the wooden escalators were not replaced and in which the cleaning of escalators was cut, along with the staff who should have raised the alarm.

The Government created London Regional Transport, set its priorities and its funding and drove senior management in its policy to eliminate subsidy. Indeed, they supported everything that London Regional Transport did until 7.30 pm on 18 November 1987.

The Government's responsibility in this matter is of paramount importance. They failed to fulfil their obligation to ensure that safety had the highest priority in London Regional Transport. That is why the Opposition's amendment will be supported tonight.

5.5 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am appalled by the speech that has just been made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). We are trying to debate a report on a major tragedy. There are real issues to be raised and we need a constructive debate. The Opposition have shown today that, apart from the old traditional Socialist view that with more money and more staff all will be all right, they are bankrupt of ideas for going forward.

We should return to basics and say, first, that we are fortunate in our capital city to have such a comprehensive and extensive underground railway network. That service is too often taken for granted. Little attention is paid to it until there is a failure, a disruption, or, as in this case, a major tragedy.

My constituency in south-east London does not have the direct benefit of an underground network, but many of

my constituents use the Underground in and around the city for many and varied purposes, either for getting to work, to visit their relatives or for entertainment. They have told me of the deterioration over the past 10 to 15 years in some aspects of the service. That did not happen in the past five years; it has been going on for 10 or 15 years. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, over the years there has been an inadequate investment in London Underground to meet the needs of a developing service.

The Fennell report has highlighted a number of areas that we need to debate in looking to the future in order to expand and improve the service on behalf of all. It has highlighted many of the complaints which the travelling public has raised as well as identifying a number of serious problems about the way in which the Underground network has been operated.

Conservative Members accept that real causes for concern have been expressed by the travelling public. We understand that and we want to do something to improve the service in our capital city. We should begin by congratulating the Government on their speedy and commendable response to the King's Cross fire and to the report's recommendations. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on his comprehensive speech this afternoon. It is imperative that we learn from this tragedy the lessons contained in the report to ensure that as far as possible such a tragedy does not happen again.

We must be constructive about the tragedy and the report. I deplore the sort of manufactured hysteria that we hear from Opposition Members such as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). Opposition Members have attempted to make party-political capital out of the tragedy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] That is, as I say, deplorable and will be deplored by everyone in the country. This is a serious issue that must be debated seriously, and not by means of sedentary interventions——

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman does his case less than justice by suggesting that we are making party-political capital out of the tragedy. He should realise that some of us have been arguing for more investment in safety measures on London Regional Transport for many years, and began to take an interest in the subject before this tragedy occurred.

Mr. Evennett: I shall come to that point later when we examine what the hon. Gentleman said about investment in transport when he served on the GLC.

This afternoon the Government have shown that they are determined to adopt a positive and effective approach. The changes that have been implemented or are being implemented are welcome, as is the vast sum of £266 million which will be spent on safety over the next three years. That is to be commended.

However, the travelling public are still worried about several matters—the frequent breakdown of trains, overcrowding and vandalism and the crime which has become commonplace on the Underground. These issues have not been raised by people who have jumped on the bandwagon: they are the realistic and long-term concerns that passengers have been expressing long before the King's Cross fire and the subsequent Fennell report——

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney and Stoke Newington): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the recent report on crime on the London Underground pointed out that the self-same matters that Opposition Members have raised to do with safety—staffing and investment—are the key to crime, too? By dismissing what some of my hon. Friends have been saying about investment for years he shows that he neither cares about nor understands the issues.

Mr. Evennett: I am sorry that the hon. Lady did not wait for me to develop my argument. The increase in crime has taken place during the past decade, not only in the past couple of years, as she seemed to suggest. Unfortunately for the Underground, for part of the past 10 years it was run badly by the GLC.

Individual complaints may be of minor importance, but the combined views of the many naturally cause concern. Too frequently in the recent past the safety and the reliability of the service have been called into question. The major issues are crime, safety and investment. Robbery, assault and the other offences against the person which have regrettably increased in the past 10 or 15 years on the Underground have made many of my constituents and the travelling public afraid to travel on the tube late at night —*[Interruption.]* I wish the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) would listen —she might learn something.

Crime denies people freedom of movement and access to many of the capital's attractions, because they cannot travel in safety on the trains. I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that he has increased the police establishment on the Underground to 350 officers. I also welcome the fact that the British Transport police is recruiting and training officers to fill the new posts. When they are in position their presence will make a noticeable difference. To date, this action has not produced significant results but I hope that there will be an improvement in time. We need to catch the people who are committing these offences while they are committing them and I am sure that more police in the service will be able to do just that——

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): While welcoming the extra commitment to police resources for the Underground, does my hon. Friend agree that the levels of violent crime on the Underground are statistically no different from those for crime above ground? Although both are too high, and although extra investment to try to combat violent crime is welcome, it is important not to get the problem out of perspective.

Mr. Evennett: That is a good point. We must not overstate the case. I was merely trying to discuss the fears of constituents in the Greater London area. We must carefully note such people's concerns and fears, of which one is crime, which we all agree is far too high throughout the capital.

Mr. Cohen: Of course we welcome the increased number of police, but 350 police to man the whole Underground system 24 hours a day are not many. The money spent on putting in automatic exit barriers could have been spent on police—on 550 of them for 10 years. Which would the hon. Gentleman prefer—police or barriers?

Mr. Evennett: We must not confuse the two. We welcome the increased number of police for the service; the barriers must be debated separately. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the increased police

[Mr. Evennett]

establishment—such a welcome was noticeable by its absence from the speech by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East.

As for the barriers, we must recognise the real problem of fare evasion on the Underground. It has been said that £25 million has been lost through evasion—a fantastic sum. Something must be done to minimise such losses. Constituents have told me of barriers which have been out of operation or have swallowed tickets. They can present difficulties for the elderly or for young mothers with children and shopping or pushchairs. These are genuine concerns which we share. But we must not overstate the case.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister of State for answering my question about the average number of gates that fail. He said that on average gates fail once for every 79,000 passengers, which represents about 16 gate failures a day. That puts the number in perspective. Although we share the concerns of those who are frightened about the safety implications of these barriers, we must bear in mind the money that is lost by people evading fares, and the true number of times when the gates fail. That is not to say that there is no problem; we await with interest the report of the independent inquiry which my right hon. Friend mentioned.

I was surprised that more public relations work for these gates was not done in advance. Fear of change and of what might happen is always the key—particularly after the tragedy of 16 months ago which highlighted some of the potential problems on the Underground. LRT has failed to communicate the importance of the installation of the gates. I am delighted, however, that my right hon. Friend has insisted on an independent inquiry into the operation of the barriers, and we await its report with interest. The fears may well be misplaced, and we should not judge the report until we see it.

In the past 10 to 15 years there have been many cycles of investment in the Underground network. As the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) mentioned earlier in a slightly different context, a few years ago the GLC operated a policy of using money to subsidise fares rather than for capital investment. That was a ludicrous policy—keeping fares down rather than considering the operation of the service. It was imperative to restore the right of management to manage without undue political interference, and that has been done since the removal of the GLC. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that Opposition Members do not like to hear the truth. They prefer their own illusions. The fact remains that a management must have the right to manage, and London Underground has a duty to use that right to ensure that the system is managed in the best interests of the travelling public.

Mr. Spearing: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that when the GLC decides to subsidise fares that is political, but that when his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State decides to cut the subsidy, thus increasing fares, that is not Government interference and is non-political? He is saying, surely, that such action is political when taken by Labour, but non-political when taken by his hon. Friends.

Mr. Evennett: The hon. Gentleman's view is not sustainable. The entire aim of the GLC's management of the Underground system was to keep fares down rather than to invest in a better transport service for the people of London and all who wanted to use it.

No one could have foreseen or prevented a tragedy like that at King's Cross. It should never have happened——

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Evennett: I have given way quite enough.

The Fennell report is comprehensive and highlights aspects that could and should have been improved; nevertheless, the scale of the tragedy could not have been predicted. Action has been taken, and I am sure that all Londoners and users of the Underground service will be pleased with that action. Too often we are quick to criticise. In this instance, praise is due not only to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to Fennell, but to new men at London Underground for their actions to date.

A debate such as this gives us the opportunity to highlight a few developments, particularly the vast investment in the London Underground of the past few years and the projected investment for the next three or four years. That investment will be used to upgrade, renew and generally improve aspects of the service. Together with implementation of the Fennell report recommendations, it should ensure a far better Underground system for the future, which will provide a more efficient and safer service in the interests of the entire travelling public.

Efficiency and safety must go together. Mere numbers of staff working at a station will not guarantee an efficient service, or a safer service. The Opposition suggest that more money and more staff will produce a better service, but surely its efficiency and safety depend on how money is spent and how staff are utilised to the best effect.

There is still much to be done to improve the service to the extent that Conservative Members would like, but at least we have started to tackle the problems and improve the service. The Government must be congratulated, and the motion should be supported. The general public will be delighted at the prospect of better investment in an important London service, rather than money being wasted on subsidising fares.

5.24 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I am grateful to you for calling me, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I have retreated to the Back Benches. Let me begin by declaring an interest—and I do so proudly. I am sponsored by the National Union of Railwaymen, which has many members in my constituency.

My constituency is dominated by railways and railway stations, including three mainline termini and no fewer than 14 Underground stations. Underground stations in my constituency include the deepest—Holborn—and the busiest—King's Cross and St. Pancras. There have been major fires in recent years at both Goodge street and Holborn stations, but nothing to compare with the horrors of what happened at King's Cross on the night of 18 November 1987.

Although the Fennell report is written in clear, unemotional, official English, many of its pages are upsetting. To read the transcript of some of the evidence given to the inquiry is be filled with horror at what happened, pity for those who suffered and—in my case at any rate—awe and admiration for the many people,

including passengers, railway staff, transport police and members of the emergency services, whose personal courage and common sense did so much to limit the extent of the catastrophe.

The inquiry, although absolutely necessary, was in itself an additional cruelty for many who had to give evidence. It forced them to relive the horrors of that night, and also subjected their every action throughout the crisis, minute by minute, to the harshest, most clinical public scrutiny —something to which few of us would like to be subjected even for an afternoon at the House of Commons, where nothing more than our reputation is at stake.

I found it a humbling experience to read how my ordinary fellow citizens reacted when faced with a fearful combination of fire, fumes, smoke, darkness, noise and panic—all of it below ground. In that heat and horror many ordinary people performed extraordinary deeds, saying afterwards that they were only doing their jobs. No words of praise or admiration from me, at least, can do justice to—for example—the fire fighter Station Officer Colin Townsley.

When Colin Townsley arrives on the scene he goes down to the booking hall, reconnoitres down the escalators and instructs other members of his watch to go back to the surface to order more pumps and bring breathing apparatus for themselves and for him. He himself stays down there, in that dangerous, horrible place, to urge passengers to get out. The flashover fire occurs. The booking hall is engulfed in flames—flames so hot that they melt aluminium. Colin Townsley gropes around in the dark, and picks up a woman who is badly injured and burned. He makes for an exit where light and air would represent life to both of them, but the fumes poison him before he reaches safety. The report says, in its prosaic way:

"his was a heroic act".

St. John's Gospel says:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Colin Townsley laid down his life for a stranger.

Constable Hanson of the Transport police, although himself very badly burned and injured, risked his life to save more people—more strangers. We should remember that to the members of the emergency services the risk of injury and death is an ever-present part of their workaday world. When a catastrophe occurs, the rest of us run away, but the people in the emergency services run towards it.

The Fennell report rightly makes it clear that the fire and the shortcomings in the response to it were not the fault of the people working at King's Cross that night, nor were they the fault of those working in the emergency services that night. But the fire should not have occurred and, having occurred, it should have been dealt with more promptly and more effectively. The responsibility for any failure lies with the managements of London Regional Transport and the emergency services, with those who laid down the priorities to be followed by those managements and with those in Government whose job was and remains to secure the safe operation of all our railways. At the pinnacle of that pyramid of responsibility is the Secretary of State for Transport.

Almost all of us who enter national politics seek important offices of state which carry personal power and personal trappings of office. They also carry personal responsibility, particularly where Ministers have played a direct part in events. The law made London Regional Transport responsible for the efficiency, economy and safety of its operations. It also required it to act in accordance with principles laid down by the Secretary of State for Transport.

In July 1984, the then Transport Secretary, the right hon. Member for Cirencester, and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), now the Secretary of State for the Environment, wrote to the chairman of London Regional Transport setting out the Government's objectives. His 838-word letter talked only of economy and efficiency, calling for reductions in costs and subsidies. It set a target for reducing unit costs and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made clear in his excellent, trenchant opening speech, the letter urged London Regional Transport to beat the target that had been laid down. That letter made no mention of the word safety. The Fennell report rightly says that people "must place safety first". The then Secretary of State placed it nowhere.

In case anyone thinks that only his letters were inadequate, I have been checking his answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in June and July 1985. After the fire at Oxford Circus, she asked the Secretary of State to have discussions with London Regional Transport about the problems of contractors' work and materials and to do something about station plans which fire brigades could use when they reached fires at Underground stations. In his usual way, the right hon. Gentleman dismissed her questions saying that they were nothing to do with him and that the hon. Lady should write to the chairman of London Regional Transport. We all know what his priorities were.

Ministers may seek to evade responsibility, but the cavalier attitude of LRT management towards safety sprang at least in part from Ministers' clear, cost-cutting priorities.

Before the King's Cross fire a report produced by the Department of Transport revealed that the Department's railway inspectorate had an establishment of 24 but that five posts were vacant. All the vacancies were for inspectors responsible for health and safety on railway premises. There was just one inspector in post to cover every station on London Underground and the Southern Region of British Rail—a total of 796 stations were to be inspected by that benighted individual. There was no possibility that he could make those inspections. The inspectorate was run within the Department of Transport and, not surprisingly, the report says:

"As a matter of policy, the Inspectorate have deliberately refrained from making any preventative checks on railway maintenance . . ."

I bet they had. One inspector for 796 stations would be lucky to visit them all in a year just waving to the staff as he passed through. The report also reveals that the chief inspector and another inspector were spending between 20 and 30 per cent. of their time advising on the Channel tunnel and that agency advice for Hong Kong and Singapore was involving the inspectorate in more work than had been expected. The preposterous irony is that those same inspectors insisted upon higher standards of safety in Hong Kong and Singapore than they required on London Underground.

How did Ministers respond? According to the report, there had been criticism from Ministers that the

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

inspectorate was seeking too much information from London Underground. How could that one man reponsible for 796 stations ask for too much information?

Department of Transport officials had a cosy relationship with London Regional Transport. They ignored reports on earlier fires and, as my hon. Friend pointed out, they sided with London Underground when the fire brigade wanted to improve safety. They issued not a single statutory safety notice to London Underground in the 18 months before the King's Cross fire and only one in the year before that. They admit that they knew that the staff was being cut and less was being spent on cleaning and maintenance. They knew that staff were not trained to evacuate stations and that the fire brigade was not usually called when there was a fire and that fire fighters found it hard to master the layout of stations. Yet they did nothing. They did not even object when London Regional Transport stopped sending them the fire brigade annual reports. I suspect that they did not even notice when they stopped receiving them.

Some may ask what are the Minister's responsibilities for those officials. It is the basis of our constitution that Ministers are responsible to the House for what their officials do. The Prime Minister is fond of quoting Winston Churchill. This is what he said on ministerial responsibility after the fall of Singapore:

> "I ought to have known. My advisers ought to have known and I ought to have been told and I myself ought to have asked."

The Secretary of State had no need to ask. Most of the facts that I have cited were available in the report produced by his own Department that was published in April 1987, six months before the fire at King's Cross.

Now we are told that everything has changed and that everyone is conscious of safety, but are they? Last year, in the summer after the fire, I managed to obtain the fire brigade's secret reports on six Underground stations in my constituency. They reported 50 fire hazards at those six stations, one of which was King's Cross. By God, if London Regional Transport had not learned that there was a danger of fire at King's Cross, they would not learn it anywhere, but eight fire hazards were listed at King's Cross, including rubbish at the top of the escalators at King's Cross where people were working on the adjacent escalators to put right the damage caused by the fire. There were other fire hazards at escalators at Tottenham Court Road, Warren Street and Euston. That report also stated that the box containing the station plan for use by the fire brigade at Mornington Crescent was impossible to reach. That was the case even though we knew that it had been a problem at King's Cross and Oxford Circus. Anyone with a grain of sense knows that it is a problem to approach a rabbit warren and risk one's life trying to save people without a plan or a guide. Admittedly, Mornington Crescent is a small station but it is still a dangerous place for a fire fighter trying to do his duty.

I want to know why London Regional Transport and the Secretary of State are defying Desmond Fennell's recommendations. He said that they should publish all the fire brigade reports on the Underground stations. Why have they kept secret the 1988 reports? The people who travel on London Underground are entitled to know the state of safety both last year and this year. We are told that we will see the reports for this year, but I want to know why we cannot see the reports for last year.

We are told that the new management will pay more attention to safety and that, as the Secretary of State describes it, a new culture prevails. If there is a new culture of safety and things have changed, how can we explain the amazing advertisement for London Underground engineers which appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* at the end of March? It said that the new management was looking for "natural risk-takers" who were "commercially aware." The people who travel on London Underground have had enough of such people and want to be rid of them. Yet London Underground with its new culture of safety is trying to recruit more.

Despite the claims of a new culture, London Regional Transport is still pushing on with the installation of the dangerous new ticket barriers, which Ministers have been forced to admit do not always fail-safe. The barriers are not the product of a management doing what Fennell suggested—putting safety first. They are the product of a cash register mentality; the same mentality that introduced into London doors on buses in which nine or 10 people have been killed over the past few years because they do not work properly.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): They are much safer than they were.

Mr. Dobson: All I can say is that if I had been caught in those doors, I would not find them much safer. I do not want to die in that way. I understand that adjustments to the doors will make them safer. Why were they not safe in the first place? They were not safe because cheapness not safety was placed first.

I will not repeat all the excellent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East but I shall talk about the emergency services. They were rightly praised on the night of the fire. However, as the Fennell report reveals, their actions were poorly co-ordinated and, with the exception of the Metropolitan police, their contingency plans were inadequate. Poor communication and inadequacies in equipment also hampered the rescue efforts.

Although the emergency services have now considered the Fennell report, I find it difficult to conclude that they are better placed now to deal with a major incident than they were in November 1987. For example, let us look at London's ambulance service. This evening it is likely that 10 per cent. of its emergency vehicles could not roll if they were called out because there are no crews for them. Tonight or this weekend, the proportion that could not roll may be as high as 25 per cent. Almost a quarter of the emergency vehicles have radios which are incompatible with the new computer-controlled radio communications system. Therefore, they cannot be properly contacted. At the recent Clapham rail crash, there was a 13 minute delay before the ambulance service called in the medical team. There are constant and justified complaints about delays in the 999 service and slow responses to calls.

The Fennell report rightly recommends that the emergency services should mount joint exercises to test their plans, procedures and personnel. The ambulance service had to withdraw at the last minute from one such

exercise organised at Hither Green because it was overstretched. Therefore, up to now, the ambulance service has not taken part in a joint exercise.

Ministers rightly paid tribute to the work of the fire brigade that night but that is all they have done. The number of front-line fire fighters in London has been reduced by 389 since the King's Cross fire. As a result, the management has arranged that certain special vehicles—not the pumps—turn out with smaller crews than in the past. What are those special vehicles? Ironically, some of them are the vehicles that carry special smoke extraction and lighting units which are important in many fires but critical for underground fires. In future, they will be sent out with fewer fire fighters to look after them. That is absurd. A special unit has been created within London's fire brigade to deal with underground fires. However, it has been financed by making cuts elsewhere.

The Home Office is now conducting what is called a fire cover review. It is confidently expected that that will lead to the closure of fire stations and less cover.

What of the hospitals visited by the Prime Minister and the accompanying television crews on the day after the King's Cross fire? University College hospital is a famous and fine hospital in my constituency. It was rightly praised by the Prime Minister. However, since the King's Cross fire, and now that the television cameras are no longer around, Bloomsbury health authority has been forced to cut its budget by over £10 million. Therefore, it is less ready to play the part that it did on that terrible night. Now there is even a threat from the regional health authority to close University College hospital and the Middlesex hospital without replacing them.

The consultant in charge of the accident and emergency unit at UCH, Howard Baderman, told me today that he is "still very apprehensive about the firmness of the region's commitment to maintain hospital services in Bloomsbury."

Where would the injured go if another fire occurred at King's Cross, or if there was a fire at St. Pancras or Euston?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My hon. Friend is making a devastating speech. He will understand that as a Scot I am often asked by my constituents in good faith whether the London Underground is safe. What answer would my hon. Friend give?

Mr. Dobson: I do not know. I do not like using the Underground, that is all I can say.

Many of the people injured at King's Cross need plastic surgery. Anybody who has seen some of them will realise just how much plastic surgery they need. I hope that they do not need it in my health authority area because the local waiting list for plastic surgery alone now totals 1,143 and over 70 per cent. of them have to wait for more than a year. I am not talking about people waiting for face lifts. In the case of people injured at King's Cross, they may be waiting to have a new face constructed. Who would like to wait for more than a year for something like that?

So the greatly praised emergency services have been cut and their future is clouded with doubts and uncertainties. Lessons may have been learnt from King's Cross but the Government do not appear to be involved in that learning process.

I visited King's Cross Underground station after the fire. I saw what it was like and tried to envisage what people had put up with. Since then, I have met passengers, people from the fire service, ambulance staff and railway staff who were there. I have met people who were burnt and severely injured and the relatives of people who died. I have been to one funeral service and one memorial service. I do not wish to go to a memorial service for someone who has died in my constituency ever again.

I have talked and listened to all those people and they are not satisfied with what has happened. They are not satisfied that those at the top have paid the proper price for their responsibilities. They do not believe that Secretaries of State, Ministers and senior civil servants have paid the price that some of the emergency services staff paid that night. They are not wholly satisfied with the Fennell inquiry because of that. They regarded the inquest as nothing more than a low and insulting farce and they are not satisfied that the system is now safe. It will be a long time before I do anything other than share their dissatisfaction.

5.51 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Close to the outset of this debate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to the heroism and sheer professionalism of the emergency services and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) later referred to the courage of the firemen, the police and others. Their bravery was of the highest order in the highest British tradition and I hope that they can be honoured, posthumously where appropriate, with even higher honours than they have received hitherto.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras went on to refer to a 1984 letter from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, who was then Secretary of State for Transport, to London Regional Transport, setting out its objectives. The letter referred to the need for London Regional Transport to operate within the London Regional Transport Act 1984, which refers to safety. It cannot, therefore, be said that my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Transport ignored the question of safety.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman should know that the primary obligations placed on London Regional Transport were to operate its system with economy, efficiency and safety. If the person who appoints London Regional Transport and who was its paymaster writes a letter which, admittedly, refers to the Act that set up London Regional Transport, but talks only of economy and efficiency, what is London Regional Transport to conclude about the priority that the Secretary of State wishes it to give to safety? If it was satisfactory to cover safety by referring to the Act, the Secretary of State needed only to write a one-line letter saying that London Regional Transport should carry out its obligations under the Act.

Mr. Jessel: The hon. Gentleman cannot have heard what I said. The letter in question referred to the requirement to operate within the London Regional Transport Act, which contains the very words referring to safety that the hon. Gentleman quoted. There was, therefore, a reference to safety. One cannot expect every major letter or communication to refer to every important consideration at equal length and with equal weight. One important letter may refer to economic objectives while referring to safety, whereas another might refer mainly to safety with a passing reference to economic considerations.

Mr. Spearing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jessel: We must live in the real world and that reference was made.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that there were 14 Underground stations in his constituency. There are none in mine; Twickenham is not served directly by the London Underground. However, my constituency has 16 British Rail stations, all of which lead towards central London and many of my constituents connect with the Underground in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who is here now, at Vauxhall or at Waterloo. Many of them, especially central London commuters, use the Underground every day.

When the terrible and deeply tragic accident occurred in November 1987, I was surprised that out of my heavy postbag from an articulate constituency—which produces some 3,000 letters directly from constituents and which generates a total of some 10,000 letters a year—I received only six letters on the subject of the King's Cross disaster. I asked myself why. I believe that people in the face of that terrible disaster had the mature and sensible view, by and large, that they wanted to await the outcome of the inquiry that was announced by my right hon. Friend the day after the accident and to see what action was proposed to prevent any recurrence of such an event. Their attitude was not to cast blame on anyone in particular, although that would be natural for some people to want to do.

It is a most unhappy story. There were 31 deaths and it is no comfort to anyone to say that it is a unique event in the history of London Underground. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyel), who has now left the Chamber, asked the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to say whether London Underground was safe. It is inevitable that the media will tend to focus particular attention on accidents in which many people die at once, whether on a train, a ferry—which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) —or an aircraft. If a vehicle in which many people are travelling is in a crash, there is a risk of many people being killed at once and that will hit the headlines, whether in broadcasting or the printed media, and impinge on the public consciousness to a greater extent than accidents in which people are killed in ones and twos.

The statistics show that it is far safer to travel on London Underground or British Rail than to travel by road, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes mentioned in a question on the statement a few weeks ago. The number of deaths in road accidents is far greater, although it has fallen fom 7,319 in 1967, to 6,614 in 1977 and to 5,125 in 1987. I understand that the figures for 1988 are likely to be announced tomorrow. Accidents in which people in ones or twos lose their lives, whether by fire, a smaller railway or Underground or a road accident, are just as tragic for the families of those involved as are accidents in which people are killed together in larger numbers, as I happen to know personally. If one considers the Government's safety record, and if one considers all transport accidents, it will be seen that there has been a decline in the level of mortality compared to five or 10 years ago.

I shall now consider some points arising out of the Fennell report and I hope that the Minister will have time to refer to them in his winding-up speech. The first is the effect of inevitable traffic jams in London streets upon the swift movement of fire engines and ambulances. We know that the King's Cross disaster took place after 7 o'clock in the evening, but the tail end of the London rush hour has now become extended. Rush hour conditions continue to apply after 7 o'clock, and they did so in that case. It took fire engines seven minutes to go 1,420 yards at an average speed of 7 mph.

I ask the Minister to re-examine the Highway Code and whatever other measures the Government might be able to take to encourage a more flexible response on the part of drivers of other vehicles on the road. For example, will he consider whether in an emergency of this sort, when they hear fire brigade bells ringing, drivers can be allowed carefully to mount the pavement to let fire engines go by, or whether any other action can be taken to get emergency vehicles through more quickly?

That is part of a wider problem. The state of the British national economy has brought about an increase of about 8 per cent. a year in motor vehicle usage in conurbations, including London. There is no easy solution, and it is a waste of time for anyone to pretend to be able to produce a swift and easy solution. But it has a consequence upon the efficient operation of the emergency services. In the light of what Fennell wrote on that matter, I should like the Government to give it particular attention.

Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that Mr. Fennell concluded that the fire was caused by a lighted match. Of course, a naked flame remains a major potential cause of fire—it always has. I am as aware of that as any hon. Member, as the royal coroner found that either a lighted match or candle caused the fire at Hampton Court palace two years ago. Naked flames are a prime cause of fires.

In the papers before us, there is reference to a ban on smoking on the London Underground. It seems overwhelmingly probable that the naked flame was from a match that was presumably being used to light a cigarette, pipe or a cigar. There is no other particular reason why someone should light a match on an escalator leading to an Underground station. As it is almost certain that a smoker was involved, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to draw London Transport's attention to the need to step up the enforcement of its no-smoking policy.

Thirdly, as the number of passengers on London Transport has increased by 70 per cent. in the past six years, which is a staggering increase, one must ask about safety implications—especially if the Government are considering measures in the short or medium term to deal with traffic congestion on the roads, which might result in an even greater number of people using the Underground —and about the capacity of Underground stations to cope with a further rise in the number of passengers.

When I have used the Underground and seen crowds of people on platforms, I have wondered whether a surge among the passengers standing there or any pressure resulting from adverse conditions might trigger off some kind of panic, resulting in some people falling off the platform, which they would not do in normal conditions. The authorities should be asked to look at the capacity of platform areas, whether in the context of fire or other risks.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): Perhaps London Regional Transport should consider banning the distribution of promotional or protest literature in leaflet form in tube stations. It tends to lead to many leaflets being discarded. When there is a mass leaflet drop, there can be many leaflets all the way down escalators and on platforms.

Mr. Jessel: That is an excellent idea. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider that suggestion. It is worthy of the most sympathetic and careful consideration.

My hon. Friend's suggestion leads me to consider buskers. One sometimes sees buskers singing or playing musical instruments at access points to the London Underground. I hope that they will not be banned. It is not necessary to do so, provided that they keep away from platforms and, preferably, from escalators. As long as they perform their songs or play musical instruments in the horizontal passages between escalators and platforms or are at ground level, I do not think that they are a danger or that they are objectionable. They lighten the tedium of people's journeys. I do not see any risk in that connection.

I do not see why I should not make my next point. I should take a very dim view if any hon. Member tried to stop me from saying it. Paragraph 3 of chapter 19 of Mr. Fennell's report states:

"In my judgement there is no evidence that the overall level of subsidy available to London Regional Transport was inadequate to finance necessary safety-related spending and maintain safety standards. I accept the evidence of the most senior management in London Regional Transport and London Underground that if funds were needed, funds were available."

That is what the most senior management said, not what Mr. Styles, a junior person, said. Mr. Fennell went on:

"There does, however, remain the question of how the available resources were allocated and used by London Underground."

That is the important point. I am glad that the Government have decided to make £266 million available over the next three years. It is double the previous amount. Users of the London Underground, whether my constituents, people from any of the other 90-odd Greater London constituencies, or people from elsewhere will be grateful for the measures that are being taken. Things need to be done, and they are being done. I shall continue to press the Government to carry on with them faster.

Mr. Dobson: It would be better if the hon. Gentleman were consistent. If he is happy to rely on the Fennell conclusion that a shortage of money did not stop anything to do with safety being done, why is it suddenly necessary to spend £266 million to put right things that were not being done? He can either accept Fennell or praise the Government for putting in the extra money. It is a bit difficult to do both.

Mr. Jessel: Not at all. There is nothing sudden about it. The increase has been steady over several years. In the light of the recommendations of the Fennell report, still more is being spent. That is the right thing to do. I am glad that it is being done, and I support it.

6.8 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): I endorse what the Secretary of State said about the impact on the lives of the individuals concerned of what occurred in that awful disaster in November 1987. Those hon. Members whose constituents' lives were shattered by what took place on that night know that it will take many years for them to come to terms with what occurred or to get over the traumatic event. It is right that we should recognise that point at the outset.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the ability of London Regional Transport and London Underground to respond to emergencies. However good the operating performance of London Underground, there are inherent risks in a system as congested as the London Underground undoubtedly is. Where large numbers of people are packed tightly into a confined space, any emergency inevitably puts lives at risk.

When the Secretary of State announced the inquiry, I thought it vital that it should examine the emergency procedures on the Underground, and the frequency with which they were reviewed and tested on a practical as well as a theoretical basis. I also felt that it was absolutely essential that the adequacy of training given to staff on the London Underground in handling emergencies be examined. I am very glad that the report goes into these issues in great depth and in considerable detail, and I welcome the clear, frank and readable way in which it presents its findings.

However, I am bound to say that the report presents a frightening picture of the almost total inadequacy of London Underground's state of preparedness to handle any emergency. Emergency procedures were almost non-existent, and where they did exist, in some cases they were positively harmful. For example, under the two-stage system of handling fires, the fire brigade was not to be called in immediately. Staff were expected to deal with minor fire incidents themselves. They were to call in the fire brigade only if a fire got out of hand—by which time, of course, precious time had been lost and lives were inevitably put in danger.

The report relates the fact that the London fire brigade objected vehemently to this two-stage system. Indeed, on 23 August 1985—the day after the Baker street fire—the brigade actually wrote to the operations director of railways, objecting very strongly to it. The brigade expressed grave concern about it and about the fact that its professional advice was being ignored. The brigade made it quite clear that it should be called immediately any fire occurred on the Underground system. I quote the letter exactly:

"I cannot urge too strongly that the two-stage procedure be withdrawn and instead clear instructions be given that on any suspicion of fire, the Fire Brigade be called without delay. This could save lives."

Despite that clearest of warnings, London Underground stuck to its two-stage system and made it very clear to staff that they should not call the fire brigade in the first instance. I welcome very much the fact that that policy has been changed, but I am bound to say that if it had been changed a little earlier, lives could well have been saved.

I want to say a word or two about staff training. Chapter 10 of the report, which deals with the response of the London Underground staff who were on duty in King's Cross that night, makes it absolutely clear that in no way could the staff be blamed. As Mr. Fennell points out, the staff were not adequately trained, there was no plan for evacuation of the station, there was no supervision, and the communications equipment either was poor or was not used.

Perhaps the most chilling comment in the entire report is this one in paragraph 4 of chapter 10:

"it is apparent that the outbreak of fire was not regarded as something unusual; indeed it was regarded by senior management as inevitable with a system of this age."

Yet, despite the inevitability of fire on the system, there was no policy to call the fire brigade at the onset of one. There were no evacuation procedures, and there was no

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proper training of staff. It seems to me that that reveals extraordinary complacency on the part of the management concerned.

When one reads chapter 10 one is struck by the fact that Mr. Fennell uses the same phrases over and over again about the performance of the staff involved: they were doing the best they could; they were unprepared, by training and experience, for what occurred; they were simply doing the best they could in a totally unexpected situation, a situation of which they had no experience. Paragraph 34 sums it up:

"Those on duty did the best they could using their common sense in the absence of training and supervision."

One pays tribute to their common sense, but surely it is appalling that they did not have the training and the supervision to enable them to do a rather better job.

The net result, says Mr. Fennell, was that

"not a drop of water was applied to the fire nor any fire extinguishers used by the London Underground staff."

That is the most incredible indictment of a management that had the safety of millions of passengers in its hands, and it inevitably raises an issue that has been underlying this debate so far—the relative priority given to safety on the London Underground system.

I do not think any hon. Member on the Opposition side of the House would argue that the management of London Regional Transport or of London Underground Limited deliberately and cold bloodedly sacrificed safety standards in the search for profits. That is not the argument. Surely the argument is that safety was not given the level of priority that it ought to have been given. The management seems to have relied on a faith that concern for safety was part of the railway operating ethos. Clearly, one ought to have been able to look to London Regional Transport, as the supervisory body, to take responsibility for monitoring levels of safety on the Underground.

That inevitably brings us to the famous letter of 20 July 1984 from the then Secretary of State to the chairman of London Regional Transport. It was not just any old letter. It did not suddenly come into the Secretary of State's head to write to the chairman. The letter was written on the foundation of the organisation, a new body just established under the 1984 legislation. Here was the Secretary of State writing to the brand new chairman of London Regional Transport, setting out four tasks, none of which embraced safety.

The Secretary of State may argue—perfectly justifiably—that the legislation placed a duty on London Regional Transport to have due regard to efficiency, economy and safety of operation. That is absolutely right, but all the four prime tasks set out by the then Secretary of State related to efficiency and economy; not one of them related to safety.

In that sort of climate, that sort of environment, London Regional Transport and London Underground Limited, and indeed the Department of Transport, were clearly all more concerned about improving value for money and about reducing the burden on the ratepayers and the taxpayers—about economic efficiency—than about safety. If one wants the underlying proof of that, it is to be seen in the very different set of objectives that the current Secretary of State has given to the new chairman of London Regional Transport—placing first, and giving the highest priority to, the issue of safety. To that extent, I welcome very much the change that has occurred.

Chapter 15 of the report quotes a very wide range of evidence, including that of ROSPA, suggesting that the level of staff training in safety issues on London Underground was totally unacceptable. The chapter goes into great detail about the inefficiency and the inadequacy of training. It says the staff really could not be expected to deal with a situation of this sort, because their levels of training were totally unacceptable. It is quite true that London Underground and London Regional Transport reacted quite swiftly to these indictments about staff training, but it is also clear from chapter 15 that Mr. Fennell was not very impressed with the first steps they had taken to improve the quality of staff training.

I accept that these were the initial, short-term reactions, and that totally different systems are planned in the longer term, and I welcome very much the fact that London Regional Transport has accepted the recommendations about the need for much more professional levels of staff training. I welcome particularly what the Secretary of State has said about joint exercises taking place at least twice a year. But surely it is important to monitor those joint exercises and the level of training to make sure that the standards that we are entitled to expect are reached.

This raises the issue of the level of monitoring safety activities generally on the London Underground. I am very glad that the concept of a safety audit system has been accepted, but we must be assured that those involved in the safety audit operation have the sort of clout within the management of London Regional Transport that they need if safety is to be given top priority. If there is to be any clash between profitability and safety, we need to be assured that safety will be given top priority.

I endorse what other hon. Members have said about information on safety improvements and safety activities being made available to the public regularly. It is quite true that passengers have a right to know about the safety systems that are in operation for their protection. Most important of all is the recommendation that the Secretary of State receive from London Regional Transport regular reports about the implementation of all recommendations in this report. I hope that the reports go further than that and do not deal only with the implementation of the recommendations. There should be regular progress and performance reports on London Regional Transport's general record of safety on the Underground and throughout its systems on London's public transport generally.

Welcome though the steps undoubtedly are that have already been taken by London Regional Transport and London Underground Limited, it is essential that this burst of activity is not allowed to run down. There must be the continuing process that the Secretary of State mentioned. We all recall that, after the Oxford Circus fire in 1985, a major report was produced by the London Passenger Transport Research Group and was taken seriously by London Underground. Several steps were taken on that report, but many of its recommendations had not been implemented by the time of the King's Cross fire. We must learn from that lesson.

In the light of the tragedy that took place on 18 November 1987, I believe that the travelling public will be

looking to the Secretary of State to ensure that never again will complacency about safety put lives at risk on the London Underground.

6.20 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): In November 1987 I had no idea of the impact that the King's Cross tragedy would have on my own life. I was not then a Member of the House, but shortly after the accident Des Wilson, whom I had met as a co-chairman of the admirable Campaign for Freedom of Information, telephoned me. Knowing that I was not engaged on business in the House, he asked me if I would run the Christmas King's Cross disaster appeal while the disaster was fresh in people's minds.

I spent the three weeks before Christmas 1987 in a Portakabin at King's Cross station. The support that we received from members of the public, every one of whom volunteered their services entirely free, was tremendously heart-warming. Hon. Members may know that on the station near the Portakabin people put a most wonderful tribute of flowers and notes and messages of one sort or another. I watched that spot for the entire three weeks up to Christmas eve 1987; it was extraordinary that, three weeks later, the flowers were being changed and fresh flowers brought.

We had no legal right to operate a collection other than on the days when the Metropolitan police gave us permission to do so. They exceptionally gave us, at very short notice, permission to mount a three-day collection for the King's Cross disaster fund. However, we literally had to start a collecting box because of the number of people who pushed open the door of the Portakabin and said, "There but for the grace of God go I." They made substantial donations, obviously at some cost to themselves. People helped who were unemployed and some people took holiday leave specifically to be able to work in the campaign. The effort that they put in was absolutely marvellous and made a great impact on me.

The only other point that I shall make in that regard is that I remember talking to one of the reporters who came to follow our progress. That reporter had been with a camera crew on the night of the fire at King's Cross. Following the moving remarks of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), I should add that the reporter told me that he had been in a lot of tough places with tough teams of people who had had to follow and to photograph disasters of one sort or another, but that he had never seen a group of people so moved as they were by the King's Cross disaster. The sheer horror aroused by it and the feeling, "There but for the grace of God go I", had a most powerful effect on a great many people.

By one of those strange ironies, since the by-election at Epping Forest in December, I now represent many constituents who use London Underground daily, and my interest in Mr. Fennell's excellent report and in the action taken by the Government as a result of it has therefore been heightened.

What do we make of London Underground Limited in the period leading up to the fire? What I make of it is that it was, and to some degree still is, an absolutely classic example of a public sector operation where, sadly, management accountability had been all too clearly lost, where there was a compartmentalisation of functions as people went about their daily business—I do not wish to imply any individual imputation but make the point simply by way of illustration—and where one might have said that the business would have run terribly well if it were not for the customers.

Then we come to the events of that night. The most important question to ask ourselves is whether one can reconcile the statement that Mr. Fennell made in chapter 19, which I shall not repeat as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) read it to the House, which effectively said that finance was not the issue, with the £266 million that the Government have laudably pledged to put right the apparent under-funding. I believe that it is perfectly proper for the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras to say, "How do you reconcile that? On the one hand you say that money was not the problem, whereas on the other hand £266 million is needed to bail us out."

I do not believe that there is any inconsistency. If I may be forgiven for quoting briefly from the report, the answer lies in a chapter to which no hon. Member has yet referred, chapter 4, in which Mr. Fennell describes what he calls

"The Ethos of London Underground",

and states:

"An understanding of the way in which the actions of London Underground and its predecessors have been conditioned by the management style and nature of the organisation, and the way in which they are likely to be so in future, goes to the heart of this Investigation and the lessons to be learned."

Management style and the management of LRT are crucial to the King's Cross disaster.

Listen to these damning words—damning in the sense that they could ever have been written about the staff of LRT at the time—that Mr. Fennell uses about the engineering directorate in paragraph 3 of chapter 4:

"There was a clear demarcation between each of the four disciplines within the Engineering Directorate, and Mr. Lawrence, the Engineering Director in post at the time of the Investigation, described his main task over nine years as that of breaking down the boundaries between the different engineering disciplines. Moreover there was little cross-fertilisation between Engineering and Operating Directorates and even at the highest level one director was unlikely to trespass on the territory of another. Thus, the Engineering Director did not concern himself with whether the operating staff were properly trained in fire safety and evacuation procedures because he considered those matters to be the province of the Operations Directorate. However such matters clearly had a bearing on the safety of passengers in stations for which he shared corporate responsibility, and the security and maintenance of the assets for which he was directly responsible."

In describing the operations directorate, Mr. Fennell states:

"Mr. Clarke, the Operations Director in post at the time of the Investigation, for his part did not concern himself with the state of the escalator machinery and machine rooms, or decisions concerning the replacement of wooden components on escalators or re-siting of water fog controls. These were seen as being in the province of the Engineering Directorate."

In paragraph 12, Mr. Fennell makes what I believe to be one of the most telling comments in the whole of the report:

"It was, therefore, a matter of some concern to me that the directors of London Underground should still subscribe to the received wisdom that fires were an occupational hazard on the Underground."

The hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) has referred to that telling indictment.

I shall not quote any further from the report, because it is there for all hon. Members to read, but I make no apology for having done so because those quotations

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illustrate one of the most crucial truths about LUL in advance of the fire—that the necessity to spend £266 million now can be reconciled with the fact that money was not the issue, because nobody had the management accountability to consider safety and to take it on board so as to ensure that out of the many hundreds of millions of pounds of resources that circulate annually within LRT a suitable amount was devoted to safety.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) made a statement that produced some consternation among Opposition Members, when he said that nobody could have foreseen the fire. He later explained that what he had meant was that nobody could have foreseen the extent and the sheer horror of the fire. Of course, he was right, but hon. Members might have been right to pick him up on the point that the fire could have been foreseen. The report makes that clear.

Therefore, it is crucial to note that the management style of LUL was defective in that there was not a proper process of accountability which brought the seriousness of the issue sufficiently to the attention of senior management. Indeed, senior management itself was conditioned to working in boxes. There is a reference to Dr. Ridley's evidence in which he said that he took the operations director and the engineering director pretty much at their word on the issues because they were extremely experienced. In other words, he had enough problems of his own, and if he could not let the engineers get on with things, what else could he do?

It is not an easy job running an organisation like LUL; it never was and it never will be. Since 1982, when Dr. Bright undertook the first strategic management review of LUL, there has been a tremendous improvement in productivity and revenue. Productivity in terms of passenger usage is up by 60 per cent. to 70 per cent. Even with fares being held at the same level since 1983, overall revenue has gone up 15 per cent. in real terms. There is a tremendous management task, but it is clear that it may be necessary to accelerate the level of capital investment that is required to put right not only the safety problems but the fact that in my constituency the Central line still runs on rolling stock introduced in 1962, on signalling equipment manufactured in 1940 and on the original power supply equipment put into the line in the 1930s.

Before Opposition Members start to make a great issue of that—I am glad to see that they are not; I appreciate that that might have something to do with my speed of delivery—let me point out that successive Governments have in a sense under-estimated the importance of management in such a great transport operation. The issue of replacement of rolling stock and equipment, of renewal and of an accent on constructive reinvestment has been there for half a century. It is a tragedy that it has taken until the 1980s for us to take up seriously the challenge of regenerating London Underground Limited. I pay tribute to the management of London Underground Limited, past and present, for the tremendous efforts it has made to put right the lack of investment in our mass transit system in this great capital city.

I shall put down a marker which may not please my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In a debate on how to operate a mass transit system in a capital city, it is necessary for hon. Members on both sides to consider common sense before dogma. Bearing in mind the fact that Underground travel has such a profound effect on congestion above ground—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham referred when he talked about the difficulty of getting emergency service vehicles through—and on pollution of the environment, the desirability of operating an attractive mass transit system is considerable.

That desirability should, if necessary, be enhanced by operating a service financed not just by the users but by central Government, so that there is a positive incentive for people to move to that system. For example, people in my constituency could take the Central line from Loughton and reach the House in about 45 minutes. At the moment they might not use the Underground for that journey because of the frequency with which it becomes a journey of one and a half hours. The most frequent comment I heard from the great number of hon. Friends who came to canvass for me during the election was, "I wish you had not told me to come on the tube. It has taken me all day to get here. I hate to think how long it will take me to get back." Thank goodness their efforts had such a welcome result.

I put down that marker. It is pivotal to the decision to inject £266 million into LUL. We ought seriously to consider at another time the overall impact of a mass transit system on a capital city and the way that it should be financed and used.

On publicity and safety, the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Holborn and St. Pancras raised an extremely important point—the public's right to know that dangers exist and that those dangers are being dealt with. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) has time to be with us. I know that she was detained elsewhere and could not be here for the earlier part of the debate. She has brought to the House a Bill of which I am proud to be a co-sponsor, the Public Safety Information Bill. Over 350 hon. Members from both sides of the House support that Bill and over 150 local authorities of all political complexions have also pledged support for it.

I draw the attention of hon. Members to page 156 of the Fennell report. In paragraph 21 on public safety information Mr. Fennell made the following statement:

> "I view with dismay the suggestion that information gained by a statutory authority which has a bearing on the safety of the public using a system for mass transportation should not be made publicly available. The travelling public have a right to know about the safety arrangements made by transport operators and the safety of places in which they habitually gather."

Later, he said:

> "I attach considerable importance to this and would hope to see the principle followed more widely in areas where the safety of the travelling public may be at stake."

Mr. Tony Banks: The Bill to which the hon. Gentleman referred is an excellent Bill, and he is right to draw the attention of the House to the enormous support that it has. Why does he think that the Government are blocking that Bill?

Mr. Norris: I prefer, for reasons that I am sure the hon. Gentleman will understand, to leave that question hanging in the air for other hon. Members to contemplate. I have made my views clear, as the hon. Gentleman understands. I believe that it is a necessary measure. I recognise that there may be technical difficulties in its drafting. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has made it clear that he

supports the principle of the Bill but believes that there are drafting problems. The principle is sufficiently important for those difficulties to be considered in Committee. That point is known publicly, and I am pleased to restate it now.

I want to underline a point made by Mr. Fennell in paragraph 24 on page 157:

"My preference would be to have London Regional Transport publish an annual report, perhaps addressed to the London Regional Passengers' Committee, in which progress, achievements and proposals of the safety programme are set out."

That is vital. Among the most important recommendations of Mr. Fennell in chapter 13 on the management of safety is no. 46, in which he says:

"Copies of the reports shall be sent to the Chief Safety Inspector and Railway Inspectorate and arrangements shall be made by London Underground to publish the reports in consultation with the London Fire Brigade and the London Regional Passengers' Committee."

We cannot afford to take lightly the public's right to know about safety dangers. The country took a great step forward when the Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 introduced by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) reached the statute book. That was a private Member's Bill, which regrettably had to be forced through tooth and nail. I am sorry that I was not in the House at that time to give it the support that it deserved.

The important issue is that Mr. Fennell is in no doubt that the public have a right to know. He says so quite unequivocally. I see that not as an invitation to know what disaster may befall one, but—referring back to the management accountability of London Underground Limited—how one would make that accountability work would be to ensure that public interest and indignation was raised by the clear indication of unsatisfactory safety practices, which would force the management of the day to take them on board and to do something about them.

It is sometimes said ex post facto that steps could have been taken that could have prevented the tragedy. I believe that, if LUL, and other parts of our public transport service, had actually been faced with public pressure to do something about safety, because of the publication of reports on safety, there is a substantial chance that the sensible work on safety that the Fennell report tells us was carried out on the Underground would have received much more attention. That is a crucial absence and we should consider that as one of the cardinal lessons of the report.

It is directly relevant to the Fennell report on the King's Cross disaster that there are similar tragic parallels to be drawn in at least two cases—that of the Bradford City fire and that of the Zeebrugge ferry disaster—because those disasters, too, did not arise entirely without foreknowledge or without any evidence that they might occur. There was evidence that they might occur, but management, because of secrecy and privacy, was able to get away with doing nothing about it.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and other members of the Government to remember that issues of secrecy are not party political issues, but are about the citizen's right to know in a democracy. The healthiest part of an open society is that it improves the accountability of those who work in the public sector. It means that there is a discipline on management to care about such issues as safety, which otherwise it would be all too easy to push to the bottom of the agenda.

If the House is so minded, it should not only pass the excellent private Member's Bill standing in the name of the hon. Member for Gateshead, East, but should move to a comprehensive freedom of information Bill, which would have among its provisions the opportunity for us to ensure that the kind of absence of public information on safety that we saw at King's Cross does not recur, and that future tragedies of this sort are prevented.

6.42 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): On behalf of those of my constituents who died in the fire at King's Cross and their families, and on behalf of those working in the emergency services based in my constituency who responded so magnificently on the night of the fire, I express appreciation for the detailed work contained in Mr. Fennell's report. I have, of course, criticisms about the remit that Mr. Fennell accepted and those aspects which were deliberately excluded from his sphere of investigation. However, the work that he and his officers carried out in ascertaining how the fire started, how it spread and how such an event could be prevented in the future was impeccable and deserves gratitude.

Because of the terrible and terrifying nature of the event, even through the clinical prose of the Fennell report comes a moving and tragic account of individual pain, of individual heroism and of human fragility in the face of unprecedented and uncontrollable forces. In Mr. Fennell's report, of course, there are many detailed, practical recommendations. A large number of those recommendations are, I am delighted to say, already in the process of implementation. A major question that we are, of course, entitled to ask is: will the funds that the Government say that they are making available—the £266 million spread over three years—be sufficient to enable all the recommendations of the Fennell report, in capital terms, to be carried out? If the answer is yes, I hope that the Minister can tell us so when he replies. If the answer is no, we are entitled to ask how else the recommendations and the work that is requested to be carried out will be financed. Will it once again be the travelling public, through their fares, who must pay for the long-overdue improvements to the Underground service?

The Government and Government Back Benchers have made much in the debate about the increases in capital funding that are now available to London Regional Transport and London Underground Limited. Of course, increases in capital funding, which many of us have been urging on the Government for many a long year, are welcome. However, how are those increases in capital funding being deployed? In some respects, expenditure is welcome. I have long been hammering at the doors of London Regional Transport and of the Government to ensure that Angel station in my constituency gets the desperately needed work that has now at long last been agreed. It took a long time coming but, nonetheless, it is welcome. I shudder to think what would happen to the island platform at Angel station if a major disaster were to occur at platform level.

Other aspects of London Underground Limited's capital expenditure, however, are not so welcome. The most obvious one that springs to mind, and to which

[Mr. Chris Smith]

reference has already rightly been made, is the installation of the new ticket barriers. I believe that the total cost of the new Underground ticketing systems is some £165 million. That money is being spent on systems and barriers about which Mr. Fennell expressed considerable disquiet. Money is being spent on barriers that, universally among Londoners, are detested and feared, because they are well aware of the inconvenience that in day-to-day use those barriers represent, and the potential dangers to safety that they represent in the event of a fire or a major disaster underground.

The Government have admitted that there are circumstances in which the barriers will not automatically open in the event of a disaster. Until those problems are put right, we rely on the presence of staff to operate the barriers and to keep them open in an emergency. That is the key point. We need a guarantee from the Government and from London Regional Transport that there will always be the requisite number of staff on hand—adequately trained and aware of what to do—to ensure that those barriers can be opened immediately if they need to be. The story, however, that we read in the Fennell report is one of inadequate staffing in the running of a large number of aspects of the system.

Two large unanswered questions arise out of the Fennell report. The first of those questions relates to the level of staffing at stations on the Underground system. Here there is an inner contradiction within the Fennell report. In paragraph 6 on page 152 of the report Mr. Fennell says:

"I found no evidence that the reduction in the number of operating or maintenance staff contributed directly to the disaster at King's Cross."

No doubt the Government will quote that passage extensively in the months and years ahead.

We may pause at the word "directly" because in some other places in the report a contradictory impression appears to be given. On page 136 Mr. Fennell addresses the issue of station operations rooms. He says that the operations room was not manned by a London Underground supervisor. He says:

"I was disturbed to learn that this had been the position since 1984, when a station inspector's post had been withdrawn and the practice of manning the station operations room had ceased."

Mr. Fennell was disturbed by that. In some ways paragraph 16 on page 141 is one of the most damning paragraphs of the entire report. Mr. Fennell says:

"London Underground set great store by the use of trains to evacuate passengers from the tube lines platforms in an emergency."

We know that that was the way in which many passengers who were due to alight at King's Cross on the night of the fire managed to escape from the conflagration. He goes on:

"However, this procedure depended critically on the availability of staff to communicate with the train drivers, to stop passengers getting off and to ensure evacuation of passengers already on the platform."

The crucial point of the paragraph is the part which says:

"In the event there was a crucial absence of adequately trained London Underground staff to cover the six tube lines' platforms prior to the flashover."

On those two specific occasions in his report Mr. Fennell clearly lays a portion of the blame for the events that led to the disaster on the inadequacy of the staffing arrangements at King's Cross on the night in question. All that ties into the crucial issue of the revenue subsidy available to London Transport. Of course the numbers and availability of staff for proper deployment in case of an emergency depends not on the capital subsidy available from the Government, but on the revenue that London Transport needs to run a full and safe Underground system. Over the last four or five years the Government have consistently cut the revenue subsidy.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend has spoken about the importance of the reduction in staff and the importance attached to that by Mr. Fennell. Is he aware that while the Government cut the revenue support they gave £45 million to London Regional Transport to pay for staff redundancies?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right, and highlights not just the absurdity but the tragedy of Government policy. London Regional Transport did not fight against reductions in staff: it insisted on reducing staff even further.

The revenue subsidy figures speak for themselves. In 1984 the Government gave London Regional Transport nearly £200 million in revenue subsidy. In 1990 the amount will be £7 million which will be specifically directed at the running of the dial-a-service. That shows the scale of the reduction in revenue subsidy that the Government have imposed on London Regional Transport.

I am sick and tired of hearing Conservative Back Benchers say how wonderful the Government are because they are gradually—but belatedly—increasing the capital subsidies to London Regional Transport. However, at the same time they are drastically cutting the revenue subsidies. Safety does not rely on physical work alone. It resides also in the availability of staff to cope in an emergency. The availability of staff is also crucial to ensure the availability of alternative exits in the event of a disaster.

On 26 March at Finsbury Park Underground station in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) only one set of stairs was in use. Two alternative exits were blocked with gates that had been deliberately padlocked. No keys were available and in the event of an emergency all exiting passengers would have had to funnel through only one exit with a very narrow passageway. On the same day at Highbury and Islington tube station in my constituency the passageways between the Victoria line and the Great Northern electric line platform were gated and padlocked. In the event of fire only one exit would have been available for passengers trying to escape. The reason given for the blocking of those exits and the locking of the gates was lack of staff.

The inadequacy of staffing continues in London Regional Transport, and the Government, Mr. Fennell and all the lessons that should have been learned subsequent to the King's Cross fire seem to have taught London Regional Transport absolutely nothing about the need to ensure that stations are properly staffed.

The other principal question that seems to arise from the Fennell report is about the role of the railway inspectorate. Mr. Fennell is shocked, to say the least, in his criticism of the railway inspectorate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has said, it is almost unbelievable that throughout 1987 one quarter of one person in the railway inspectorate was detailed to supervise the conditions at London Regional

Transport Underground stations. A year after the fire the situation was precisely the same. Although the Secretary of State for Transport now tells us that the railway inspectorate is almost up to complement, he has offered no explanation in response to the questions that I asked him on 10 November about, why for a year following the King's Cross fire, the railway inspectorate was not as a matter of urgency brought up to complement even before the findings of the Fennell report were published.

We are now entitled to ask the Secretary of State to answer the two questions that I asked him then. Why was the inspectorate not brought up to strength during the year following the fire? Will he also tell us not about the entire complement of the railway inspectorate, because that is the figure we so often get, but about precisely what resources the inspectorate, now that it is almost up to full complement, is able specifically to devote to safety at London Underground stations? It would be extremely revealing to know the precise answer to that question.

Of course I accept and fully support what the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) said about the need for greater openness and the public being able to know what the safety inspectorates are doing. The Bill that I introduced last year and to which the hon. Gentleman in his private capacity gave considerable support outside the House had to be carried through in the teeth of opposition from Government Whips who blocked it week after week until we finally shamed them into accepting that it should be placed on the statute book. It was a minor measure designed to give the public some degree of access to information about reports and notices issued by the safety authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) has a Bill now before the House which would go further. Again, it is a modest but important measure, and again the Government Whips, led by the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), block its progress. May we have an assurance that my hon. Friend's Bill will at least have the chance of a Second Reading and a debate in Committee so that any detailed points can be sorted out? It is time that the Government gave that commitment, as a practical response to the points that Mr. Fennell makes about the need for openness, disclosure and public access.

Other important issues relating to the future of King's Cross are at stake. Dr. Ridley's comments at page 154 show that he regards congestion as one of the major problems for public safety. King's Cross, as Mr. Fennell reports, is the most congested set of Underground stations on the London tube network. About 250,000 passengers pass through that station on an average weekday.

It must therefore give pause for thought when BR, together with London Underground, present the King's Cross Railways Bill, a private measure which includes proposals designed to increase congestion at that station both below and above ground. It will shortly come before the House for Second Reading. I hope that hon. Members will take to heart the points Mr. Fennell makes about congestion and safety when they consider that that Bill would add yet another Underground station to the existing five clustered together below ground at King's Cross.

Mr. Dobson: Will my hon. Friend confirm the preposterous intention of BR to build a vast cavern underneath the existing tube station and main line station at King's Cross so that Britain's second Euro-station will be the famous concrete hole in the ground to which the chief inspector referred when he was talking about a smaller cavern that BR is building at Heathrow?

Mr. Smith: That is precisely what BR is proposing. If I have anything to do with it, it will not proceed. King's Cross is already too congested above and below ground. It cannot cope with an additional international terminus located below ground such as BR and London Underground are proposing.

There are major lessons from Mr. Fennell's report yet to be learned—lessons about the level of revenue subsidy as well as capital subsidy that is available to the Underground system; about the level of staffing at stations; about the role and nature of inspection; and about the future of King's Cross. There is no sign that LRT or the Government have learned those lessons. For the sake of the travelling public, and the memory of my constituents in particular, we deserve a better response.

7.4 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): It is important to consider the background to the Fennell report, and I am pleased that the two members of the shadow Cabinet who have spoken in the debate, the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), praised the report and welcomed Mr. Fennell's comments.

When Mr. Fennell was asked to chair the inquiry he was considerably rubbished by Opposition Members, who claimed that he would not do a fair and reasonable job but would merely report what the Government wanted. I hope that they will now accept that Mr. Fennell did a comprehensive job and that we have before us a fine report which, hopefully, will lead to improved safety on the Underground.

I regret that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East said that the Opposition would force a vote at the conclusion of the debate. Labour Members seem to have found an excuse to vote against the report. That is a pity because it sends out the wrong signals about the way in which we should be approaching the report. We should be considering it constructively and ensuring that all its recommendations are implemented.

A paramount question is whether in recent years the underground system has improved or deteriorated. Oddly, perhaps, the answer must be yes to both parts of that quesion. My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) said that there had been a 70 per cent. increase in six years in the number of passengers using the Underground. For LRT that has been a magnificent triumph. Those who were concerned with the Underground some years ago would have considered such a turnround in the situation to have been impossible. We recall how, whichever body was running London Underground, the rate of passenger use decreased by 1 or 2 per cent. a year. Since LRT took over—perhaps since political interference was removed from the system—there has been a tremendous increase in usage.

It is because of that increase that the system has deteriorated. People boarding Underground trains on the Metropolitan line at Pinner or the Piccadilly line at Rayners Lane suffer dirty and crowded trains in which they cannot get a seat when they manage to board, and the platforms are crowded.

[Mr. Robert G. Hughes]

Despite that—indeed in response to it—there has been a large increase in capital spending. The Government are now giving LRT, for capital spending on the Underground, double that allocated by the GLC in its last year of existence. The GLC's spending plans would have kept capital investment levels constant. That must be borne in mind when Labour Members complain about the sums that should be spent on London Underground. Their comments on that score are claptrap because it is clear from the spending plans approved by the GLC in the last year when it had responsibility for the Underground that spending levels would have remained constant.

It is no good the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) complaining that all he hears from the Conservative Benches are comments about increases in capital investment. He will hear a lot more about that because those increases will bring about the safety measures that we all want.

The revenue subsidies which were poured into LRT by the GLC were largely a complete waste of money. The hon. Member for Finsbury, South and Islington and other Opposition Members will be aware that that money was used to keep fares artificially low. It is clear that increases in fares have not deterred passengers because of the increase in passenger usage. Fare levels are not a huge consideration.

Uncharacteristically, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury did not include any figures in his comments. I rather suspect that he has examined the figures already and is aware that the reduction in revenue support matches the amount of money which has not been used for subsidising fares. It has not been removed from revenue support for staff, safety or running the system.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why transport systems in other capital cities in Europe still receive about 80 per cent. in terms of revenue support to keep fares low? That is the big attraction of the Paris Metro. Why are they doing that in other countries?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) probably spends most of his time in his chauffeur-driven car. If he travelled on the Underground, he would be aware of the fact that it is sometimes impossible to get on a train. The hon. Gentleman can hardly claim that the level of fares acts as a deterrent to passengers. What is the point of pouring public money into subsidising fares if they do not act as a deterrent? The hon. Member for Newham, North-West and his colleagues on the GLC milked the capital investment which should have been invested in LRT and perhaps that caused some of the problems that we have now. They used that money to subsidise fares. I do not believe that that did Londoners or London Underground any good.

Mr. Tony Banks: Since the Conservative Government abolished the GLC, I have not had a chauffer-driven car at my disposal, as the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is well aware. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] Yes, it is a shame.

I can assure the hon. Member for Harrow, West that I use the Underground and British Rail every day to get to the House. However, will he answer the question that I put to him? Why are the operating costs of systems in other capital cities subsidised to a much higher level, in some cases at about 80 per cent., while in London there will soon be nil revenue subsidy?

Mr. Hughes: At last the hon. Member for Newham, North-West has provided me with a good reason why the GLC should have been abolished. It took him out of his chauffeur-driven car and put him on the Underground.

Mr. Dobson: If depriving my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) of a chauffeur-driven car is the sole justification that the hon. Member for Harrow, W[illegible] (Mr. Hughes) can think of for abolishing the GLC, that is hardly a proper justification for transforming the whole of local government in London.

Mr. Hughes: I would not disagree with that.

A comparison between our transport system and that of systems in other capital cities is not reasonable. As has been said, our system is much older and larger. If revenue subsidies are not needed—and I do not believe that large revenue subsidies are needed—I do not understand why the hon. Member for Newham, North-West is arguing for them. We need more capital expenditure.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) is now a London-ish Member and able to make a good contribution to our debate. I join him in saying that the Government should not be afraid of saying that if more capital subsidy is required, it must be provided. The need for extra subsidy is the major subject on which I receive letters from my constituents. The number of hours that my constituents have to spend on London Underground makes their lives a misery.

We should welcome the fact that the Autumn Statement provides £266 million over three years for the Fennell report to be implemented in full. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest that if that proves not to be sufficient, and if more money is needed, the Government should respond generously. The Government's record in that area suggests that they will consider the matter generously and be prepared to provide the necessary money.

No reference has been made in the debate so far to the exchanges between counsel on behalf of the National Union of Railwaymen and the inspector. Mr. Cooper, the counsel for the National Union of Railwaymen, admitted during the inquiry that the fire was not the result of inadequate investment in the Underground. The exchange went as follows. The inspector said:

"It is the allocation of resources that I at the moment am persuaded about. I do not believe that there was a shortage of money; it was a question of allocation of it."

Mr. Cooper said:

"Quite so, sir, and the wider aspect that another party was pursuing on that."

The inspector said:

"I do not think that the disaster is about costs, if I can use that phrase?"

Mr. Cooper said:

"It is the allocation, getting priorities right."

To which the inspector agreed.

I believe that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East was rather confused when he opened the debate for the Labour party. If the management structure was poor, it was simply not up to making safety the required priority. There is no doubt that good management and safety go hand in hand in industry, whether in the public sector or the private sector. If there is not good safety, we can

guarantee that there is not good management, and vice versa. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East understands that. He does not understand that simply because the money is available that does not mean that it will be spent on the right things if there is poor management.

As has already been mentioned, it came as a shock to all of us who have examined this matter to discover that it was not LRT's policy to call the fire brigade immediately in the event of a fire. Smoke was obvious earlier in the evening and had the fire brigade been called when the smoke was first spotted the tragedy would not have occurred.

I welcome the fact that the London fire brigade claims that it now has a good relationship with LRT. It is called out on every occasion and, more to the point, it wants to be called out on every occasion as it would rather attend a series of false alarms than not be there on the spot when it is needed.

Opposition Members have referred to fire safety certificates which relate to the Fire Precautions Act 1971. It was thought that King's Cross did not need a fire safety certificate and it did not have one. Apparently no one thought that an application needed to be made. According to the Fennell report:

"Broadly speaking, the fire certificate may impose requirements for securing that the means of escape are adequate to meet the circumstances of the case, and are properly maintained and kept free from obstruction; that firefighting equipment is sufficient and satisfactorily maintained, . . . that employees are appropriately trained to deal with fire and its consequences."

That seems to be very sensible and it is welcome that fire safety certificates will be applied for by other stations. However, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East did not say that that applies only to the larger stations.

The Fennell report, on page 241, continues:

"It should be observed that a significant number of smaller underground stations would fall outside the ambit of section 1 of the FPA 1971, owing to the employment limits not being satisfied."

I agree with the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury that the Angel, a station that I use fairly frequently, may not fall within that Act because it is relatively small. My hon. Friend the Minister should consider whether all Underground stations should be required to have fire safety certificates.

Hon. Members have already covered the detailed specific recommendations in the report, but I want to make one point about the King's Cross management. On page 18, the report says:

"London Underground did not guard against the unpredictability of fire."

That is strange. I have never run a large concern, but in doing so surely safety must come first. It is interesting to compare what I have read in the report and what I know about London Regional Transport as a result of being involved with it on the GLC with my experience over the past few months while doing an industry and parliamentary trust fellowship with a chemical company. It is noticeable that in that chemical company, engaged in dangerous processes where people could be hurt making highly flammable chemicals, safety is the first item on the agenda at every executive and local board meeting and at meetings between management and trade unions. Safety is a primary issue.

One question that I would ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider, the answer to which I cannot find in the report, is whether London Regional Transport or London Underground Ltd. has a director not primarily, but solely responsible for safety. I genuinely believe that without that the safety audit that is talked about in the report will not do the job that we want done. We need a man on the board to be in charge of safety.

We welcome the new and experienced chairman, Mr. Newton, at London Regional Transport. We have to give him time to come up with the goods to provide the underground system that we need. He deserves a year before we judge whether he has done that job. His task will be to take a proper management grip on London Regional Transport. There are visible signs that we should look for. A tiny but important example which could cause a problem is the indicator board at Baker street, a station which my constituents use when travelling on the Metropolitan line. That board is the only way in which in advance of announcement people know from which platform their train will leave. A light on that indicator board has not been working for three years. A management which had a grip would have replaced that bulb. My message to Mr. Newton is that I and my constituents will be looking closely to see whether that bulb is replaced. That may sound a light-hearted matter but, as the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) knows because his constituents use the same line, many people have to move a long distance and that could cause a considerable problem.

We shall want to see that rubbish is cleared away from the Underground system. Knowing that I would seek to catch your eye this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was looking at litter when I travelled to the House of Commons today. I was not very impressed with the rubbish and the lack of cleanliness in the various stations that I used. I have no objection to people using bicycles —how could I when at the general election I voted for my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) —but I found it rather surprising to see someone take a bicycle on to a District line train today. That is not very safe and I wonder whether that should be reconsidered.

We shall also look for visible signs of security and safety on the trains. New Metropolitan police have been allocated to the Underground. I do not want to go into this in detail as other hon. Members wish to speak, but the response of the management and the Metropolitan police to the Guardian Angels was that the assistance of citizens was not needed or wanted. Whether the Guardian Angels are a reasonable group of people, or whether they were right for the London Underground, is not relevant. Such a group, even if it had to go under a different name, could have been managed by the Metropolitan police as a new branch of the specials. Citizens want to improve physical safety on our trains and platforms and they should have been encouraged to do so, not snapped at. They would have been a great benefit to the community. London Regional Transport's management should see whether we can encourage people to help with security.

Overcrowding on platforms is also a problem. At the last meeting that I had with Dr. Ridley before he resigned I raised the problem of overcrowding, particularly on the Victoria line at Victoria station where it is dangerous day after day. I may have taken some time to find out about that, but Dr. Ridley clearly did not know about it. It is still going on and we look to London Regional Transport to do something about it.

[Mr. Hughes]

London Regional Transport should give real decision-making power to lower management. That has been done in connection with buses and in my constituency the bus service has improved as a result. After some initial teething troubles, Harrow Buses now runs a more comprehensive and reliable system than at any time since I have been a Member of Parliament. I have not had one complaint about the buses for six months. I shall probably now receive a torrent of letters complaining about them. Nevertheless, I have not had one complaint and that is a tribute to Harrow Buses. Real power has been given to local management and that could work on London Underground.

This is a good report. It has not been allowed to gather dust as so many reports do. It is a blueprint for a safe and easy-to-use Underground system. I commend the report and I commend the Government's response to it so far.

7.27 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a moving spech, as he did at the time of this particularly unfortunate tragic event. He paid tribute to the emergency services in London and elsewhere. We should be far more mindful of those services, not just when there is a tragedy—I regret that there have been too many transport tragedies recently—but all the time.

Words are cheap in this place. In some cases they are almost useless. We should not just wait for the occasion when the House unites in expressing profound regret at some calamitous event and then pays its normal orthodox tributes to the emergency services. Our capital city has superb emergency services. In many respects they are far better than we deserve, given the resources we make available to them. I hope that we shall return to provision for the ambulance service, the fire brigade and the police on an occasion other than after some tragedy that concentrates our mind. Then perhaps we can speak with a clear and easy conscience in the House. As far as I am aware, there are not many dangers in being a Member of Parliament. The only thing that we are likely to die of in this place is boredom. We do not face dangers such as those who serve the people of this country in the emergency services face daily.

I shall not go through the various points in the Fennell report in a forensic way—that has already been done for some time now. I want to draw some general conclusions about transport in London from the report. I was grateful recently when the Secretary of State found time, as they say, during his busy day to come to a meeting of the London group of Labour Members for a general discussion about transport facilities and provision in the capital. The right hon. Gentleman was helpful; there was no great meeting of minds, but we were grateful to him for listening to our points and trying to answer some of them.

The Secretary of State said one thing that shocked all our members. We had pointed out that there were so many reports and inquiries in London at present that we wondered who was taking a strategic overview of transport in London. From the chair, I asked him whether, since he had removed the strategic authority—the Greater London council—he was now effectively the strategic transport authority for London. He said that he was not. My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) invited him to assume that responsibility. This is one of the gravest problems we face in London. No one is looking at the overall pattern of transport provision. That is a fatal weakness, and the Government must deal with it soon.

Mr. Spearing: I would not have intervened but for the fact that I tabled a question to that effect, to which I have just had a written answer. The Minister for Roads and Traffic said that legislation had

"established London Regional Transport and charged them with the duty of planning and providing passenger transport services for Greater London."

Apparently, the duty now devolves on LRT, which does not fill me with confidence.

Mr. Banks: That does not sound like what really happens. I cannot see how LRT can be responsible for the whole transportation system in London. Network SouthEast might have a few words to say about that.

I went to see British Rail board members about the siting of the second London terminal for the Channel tunnel, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). I asked British Rail about the strategic implications of more and more people coming through King's Cross station area and the problems that that would cause for central London. British Rail board members said that they were sorry but that British Rail was a commercial transport undertaking, charged by the Government with being just that. They said that British Rail was not the strategic transport authority for London or the south-east—and that is correct.

All this is nonsense. The CBI has now decided to make some noises about the chaos that is beginning to overtake London transport. It is not good enough for the Government, the Secretary of State, Ministers or their apologists on the Back Benches to say that the market can somehow deal with all those matters and that there is no need for a strategic transport planning authority in London—there manifestly is. Such authorities exist in other capital cities in Europe; the Government must deal with this problem forthwith.

I should like to discuss capital and revenue subsidy for LRT and London Underground Limited in the context of what was done when the GLC was responsible. The Government have consistently pointed to high levels of capital investment on the Underground. I put it to the Minister that some of that capital expenditure makes the Underground system less safe. I refer immediately to the £165 million that is being spent on the Underground ticketing system and those infamous ticket barriers. They have been installed not for safety but to try to cut fare evasion. We join Conservative Members in saying that it is wrong for so many people to evade their fares. They make honest fare-paying passengers pay more. However, given the level of unemployment and social deprivation in London, it is not surprising that, with fare levels rising, people evade payment.

That answers the point made by the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), who said that no disincentive was caused by high fares. There is disincentive; it arises from people not paying the fares and still using the system. Then expensive capital investment is needed to cut the fare evasion that was created by sticking up fares in the first place. The hon. Gentleman needs to adopt a more sophisticated approach.

The other point about deterrence is that it begs the question: how does the hon. Member for Harrow, West know how many people who are not travelling on the system because of high fares have been deterred by them? If he claims that the answer shows up in the level of passenger usage, I put it to him that, because of the chaos on the roads, more and more people are using the transport system, not because they think it wonderful or comfortable but because it is the only way in which they can travel. Some people cannot exercise any choice. The hon. Member for Harrow, West should take other social factors into account before saying that higher fares do not constitute a disincentive.

We have heard about the failure of the gates. One does not need a Ph.D in transport management to work out, having used them, that the gates are highly inconvenient at the very least, particularly for people with luggage, children and pushchairs. They have made it more difficult and inconvenient to travel on the system. As was shown with the introduction of one-man operated buses, LRT could not give a monkey's toss for what the customer wants on the Underground or the buses. It receives plenty of complaints and just ignores them. Unless the Government are prepared to exercise their function as the transport authority to which London Regional Transport reports, customers of the Underground and bus system will complain into empty air.

One quarter of the capital investment for the Underground outlined in LRT's annual business plan for 1987-88 for the three years to 1989-90 was allotted to stations. In 1985-86, £34 million was spent on station modernisation.

"The refurbishment of stations has done little for passenger safety. At some stations refurbishment has meant covering up old wiring and asbestos panels with plastic, creating new fire risks."

That is the opinion of the London Hazards Centre. The hon. Member for Harrow, West mentioned overcrowding on station platforms—yet much of the modernisation has had the effect of reducing platform areas. They may look prettier when passing through but for those standing on them they become less safe. This problem, too, needs attention.

The Government and Conservative Members have argued that they are spending more than the GLC did. I looked up the figures, because I guessed that the subject would come up in debate. The Government prevented the GLC from spending money on the Underground. I served on the Standing Committee considering the London Regional Transport Bill, in which the Government took responsibility for LRT from the GLC and vested it in themselves. That was done not because it was considered to be in the interests of the fare-paying public in London; it was done as a prelude to the abolition of the Greater London council.

The then Secretary of State for Transport—the present Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley)—was warned time and again. I have been reading the report of our proceedings, and recall that I was one of those who kept jumping up to say, "You are going to cut back on safety." The right hon. Gentleman pooh-poohed it—as he always does—saying, "Nonsense. I have complete confidence . . ." and so on.

We were saying all this long before the tragic disaster at King's Cross, and we need no lessons from Conservative Members who say that we are trying to gain a party political advantage from that disaster. We are not doing that, but we certainly do not intend to say nothing and to allow the tragedy to cover up the real political battles that have taken place in Committee and on the Floor of the House. Unless we fight and win such battles there will be more King's Cross disasters, and no hon. Member wants that to happen.

The GLC wanted to spend £669 million on transport in 1983-84, its last year as the body responsible for LRT. The Government accepted expenditure of £461 million. At the time, the GLC said:

"These cuts have meant that the programmes devised by the council to maintain and modernise London's transport infrastructure have not been fulfilled. In particular London's 10-year programme to modernise the Underground"—

we must remember that nearly all the central London system is more than 70 years old—

"had to be curtailed."

That was the result of a decision made by the Government on purely party political, ideological grounds. They wanted to ensure that the GLC did not invest in the London Underground system, and they wanted to cut public expenditure.

Capital investment may well have increased under the present Government, but subsidy has virtually disappeared. That cannot be ignored by the hon. Member for Harrow, West or his hon. Friends. When the Government took over public transport in London in 1984, the last year of GLC control, operating subsidy stood at nearly £200 million. For 1988-89, subsidy is expected to be £39 million; next year it will be down to £7 million—and the only reason for that £7 million is a Government grant to LRT to operate the grossly under-funded door-to-door service for the disabled, dial-a-ride. That too was originated and paid for by the GLC.

It should at least concern us that in the mid-1980s public transport in, for example, Turin covered 87 per cent. of operating costs. In Rome the figure is 81 per cent. In Amsterdam it is 80 per cent., in Paris 54 per cent., in Brussels 74 per cent., and even in that home of capitalism, the United States, Chicago and Washington have figures of 47 per cent. and 51 per cent. respectively. Why should the position be so different in London? The hon. Member for Harrow, West said that it was because we have the oldest and most extensive system, but that is an argument for funding it, and for funding it more generously than other capital cities fund theirs.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: No. That is an argument for spending more on capital, not for revenue subsidy. It was the hon. Gentleman and his friends on the GLC who did the opposite and caused so much damage.

Mr. Banks: I realise that the hon. Gentleman was chatting away when I read out the figures for capital and revenue, but he cannot keep repeating this one. It simply is not true. I thought I had explained at the beginning of my speech why I believe that it is possible through spending on the revenue side to avoid spending so much on the capital side—although I accept that capital investment is needed. The revenue side covers the number of uniformed staff who operate on the tranport system. That means that it is unnecessary to put capital investment into these ridiculous gates.

If we are serious about dealing with crime, safety problems and ticket evasion, we should consider the

[Mr. Banks]

revenue subsidies that would provide adequate staffing levels. Not only are they needed; they are what the public demand. We need not one or the other, but both. At least the hon. Member for Harrow, West has come halfway to agreeing with us that not enough is being spent on the capital side. I hope that eventually he will also see the sense of investing far more on the revenue side, for the two cannot be divorced in the simple way that he suggests.

If the Government are serious about Underground safety, why are they allowing LRT to get rid of all the guards? It makes no sense. I will say for the Minister that he is far more attuned to safety needs in the transport system than the former Secretary of State—the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury—would ever have been. He showed not the slightest interest in, or concern about, London's transport system. In the enormous letter that he sent to the chairman of LRT, he did not mention safety once. That was how much such priorities obsessed him: he could not care less. It is he who should be here in the dock today having to answer for what happened at King's Cross and elsewhere, but of course he has got out from under and is causing mayhem somewhere else in the body politic.

The Bakerloo line will be the next to lose all its guards. What will happen to passengers if there is a fire in a tunnel which incapacitates the driver? That is a serious possibility. There were 1,248 fires on the Underground in 1988, compared with 844 in 1987. A spokesperson for the London fire brigade tells me that there has been an increasing incidence of fires in tunnels. When the guards have gone, who will be responsible for safety if something happens to a driver?

According to a report in *The Observer* of 19 February 1989, there is still no automatic override to prevent driver operators from opening the doors on the wrong side. If the Government have really established the safety culture of which the Minister speaks, they must consider such matters, and I expect the Minister to do just that.

Let me conclude by asking the Minister a few specific questions. The Fennell report's verdict on the railway inspectorate is that it is mistaken in its interpretation of the law, which has been too relaxed, and that it has misunderstood its responsibilities. That is indeed an indictment. What progress has been made on Fennell's recommendation that consideration should be given to the establishment of a single passenger safety inspectorate, charged with monitoring and supervising standards in all passenger transport? If the Minister wants to prove his worth as one who subscribes to the idea of the safety culture, he should put it into effect. We do not want words; words are cheap in this place. What we want is a testament that there will be action.

Let me also ask the Minister why journalists and Members of Parliament still find it difficult to obtain information about safety from both LRT and London Underground Limited. Fennell says that the travelling public have a right to know about the safety arrangements made by transport operators, and the safety of the places in which they habitually gather.

The Minister knows, as I know, that the new ticket barriers are not safe. He gave assurances to the House in good faith, but then had to write letters to hon. Members saying that he had been misled. I hope that he kicked the posteriors of those who inadvertently misled him into misleading us. If those new barriers are unsafe, why did not LRT employ an independent safety consultancy to look at them instead of Mott McDonald, a civil engineering consultancy that has worked with London Underground Limited many times before? Will the Mott McDonald report be made public when it eventually lands on the Secretary of State's desk?

What progress has been made in involving the unions more closely in safety matters? Fennell says:

"There must be more employee participation in the preparation and execution of London's underground safety programmes."

The management of London Underground Limited is still mediaeval. There is to be another strike next week. If the Minister is interested in safety he must investigate the present industrial relations in London's transport system.

The Government have been monumentally complacent about the underground system and, as the Secretary of State admitted, they have denied any responsibility for the strategic overview. In the past, they have shown themselves unfit to run the Underground and bus system of the capital city. I remember the former Transport Minister telling the House:

"Ratepayers are well satisfied at finding less than half the sum which the GLC would have required in subsidy to mop up the industry. Neither I nor the management are complacent."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1987; Vol. 111, c. 9.]

I wish that Ministers would meet the travelling public in London more often. Then they would realise just how dissatisfied people are. The Fennell report reveals exactly how complacent the Government and London Regional Transport have been, and indicts the Government as derelict and unfit to be responsible for the running of a transportation system. That is the accusation I level at the Government tonight.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. There are still eight hon. Members, four from either side of the House, hoping to speak in the debate. Time is getting short, so I hope that hon. Members who are called will be fair to others by making brief speeches.

7.50 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I shall honour your injunction, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and be brief. I apologise for not having heard the two opening speeches, but a member of the royal family was opening a hospital in Ealing and that detained me.

I shall make two quick introductory points. First, quite rightly, smoking is banned on London Underground, but a number of stations, including Ealing Broadway, are joint British Rail and London Underground. Platform 4 of British Rail backs on to the Central line platform eastbound. Smoking is banned on London Underground but not on British Rail. There is a common booking hall and other common parts of the station. It would simplify matters if smoking were banned throughout joint British Rail and London Underground stations as it would avoid the present confusion. Secondly, 18 months after the tragedy at King's Cross one man who died is still unidentified. It is sad that we live in a society in which someone can die and no one notices—no friends, no family

and no employer. If it is tragic to die in circumstances such as the King's Cross tragedy, how does one describe a death that no one notices?

I wish to make three points about the Fennell report which is excellent. In particular, I pay tribute to the diagrams which are essential if one is to understand the three-dimensional nature of the problem. Although the Fennell report relates to King's Cross, much of it has a much broader application. Chapter 14 on "The Auditing of Safety" recommends a structural response to safety issues which is equally relevant to construction companies and the airline industry. The concepts of introducing safety audits paralleling the financial audits, setting standards of safety and monitoring progress towards them are extremely relevant. I hope that the recommendations will be read not only by people responsible for London Underground but by people who have broader responsibility for safety throughout commerce and industry.

The same is true of chapter 15 which deals specifically with "Station Staffing and Training." The approach that it recommends is equally applicable throughout British industry. The concept of proper training, proper fire prevention drills and the evaluation of job training and joint exercises with the emergency services have a much broader application than London Underground. One can well imagine the shambles described in chapter 10 being replicated in other parts of our society if there were a similar fire. Much in the report has general application and I hope that the coherent response on safety issues that is recommended will be taken up more broadly.

Secondly, I wish to raise some of the specific action taken by British Rail to deal with the recommendations. I declare an interest—sadly, not a financial one—as a sponsor of the British Rail (King's Cross) Bill. Much in that Bill will not be controversial. Part of the work suggested involved an escalator and a subway connection between the Circle line platforms and the three tube line platforms. That will allow passengers to change lines without passing through the ticket hall as they do at present. That work would reduce the pedestrian flow through the ticket hall by about 30 per cent. and release enough space to accommodate further growth in demand for several years to come. I hope that there will be no difficulty about that. There are also plans to enlarge the existing underground ticket hall on the north and west sides to provide additional circulating space to deal with further growth in demand.

An eastern ticket hall under the Bravington block on the corner of York way and Pentonville road is to be constructed to serve the three tube lines and the Thameslink platforms. That will replace the existing street entrance in Pentonville road, but it is in a far better position so is expected to take pressure off the existing entrances to the Underground and the ticket hall. The relocation of the Thameslink station, the expansion of the Thameslink services and the new subway connections between the Thameslink platforms and the main line platforms at King's Cross will segregate the British Rail traffic from that on the London Underground and avoid some of the congestion that has been referred to.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who is not in his place, said that if King's Cross were to be the international terminal the problem would be made worse. I hope that we will have the opportunity to debate the matter more fully, but one can argue exactly the opposite with some force. If King's Cross were chosen as the second international terminal for London, it would reduce the number of passengers who would otherwise have to cross London from Waterloo, many using the Underground. If there were through trains to the north going through London it would reduce even further the number of people who would have to travel to King's Cross to change trains. Therefore, the arguments adduced by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury are not all one-sided and one can argue the opposite. Doubtless we shall do so on a suitable occasion.

Thirdly, the problem at the heart of the Fennell report and our debate is congestion. Page 153 of the report states:

> "We heard evidence about the greatly increased use of the Underground system in recent years and the effects of congestion on passenger safety at King's Cross station and more generally."

Almost every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate has mentioned congestion on the Underground. All the forecasts that I have seen suggest that it will get worse. So we are confronted with the problem of increasing capacity. We have squeezed almost all the capacity out of the existing system. We could create some marginal extra capacity by introducing new signalling systems, new rolling stock and perhaps some adjustments to platforms, but ultimately we need new tube lines in London to reduce pressure on the existing system.

Finally, given the understandable constraints on public expenditure to which all Conservative Members subscribe, will my hon. Friend the Minister explore to the full the opportunities for joint funding of new tube lines in London? Will he engage urgently in negotiations with the private sector to find some way of expanding the public transport network in London without relying wholly on public sector finance? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his Department have done sterling work by getting the private sector to invest in transport. The Dartford crossing is a good example and the Heathrow express linking Paddington to the airport will be privately funded. There is an opportunity for my right hon. Friend to pursue even further the initiatives on which he has already embarked to get at the heart of the problem underlying our debate. There is simply not enough capacity on the public transport system to cope with London's booming economy. If we are not to bust the public expenditure constraints which we accept, and if we are not to put up with the congestion, we shall have to look urgently at the solutions that I have mentioned to see if, as Conservatives, we can get the private sector to invest in the improvement of the capital's infrastructure and resolve the problem at the heart of our debate this evening.

7.58 pm

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The Secretary of State said that the lessons of Fennell go wider than London Underground. That is true. The lessons of the Fennell report go to the heart of the Government's attitude to public service and public spending and I shall return to that later in my speech.

Like thousands of my constituents in Hackney, I use King's Cross station and termini every day. Like thousands of people throughout London, when I heard the news of the King's Cross fire and heard about the dreadful way in which those people died, struggling to get to the surface, like millions of Londoners who are regular commuters, I thought, there but for the grace of God. . . .

[Ms. Diane Abbott]

I remember—I doubt whether the Secretary of State or Ministers do because they do not use the tube regularly—travelling through King's Cross station the day after the fire and looking at the set expressions on commuters' faces. It will not avail Conservative Members to read from the Whips Office briefing. It will not avail the Secretary of State to talk about more money being spent and more capital investment. I have used London Underground since I was a schoolgirl travelling to Harrow County school for girls on the Metropolitan line. I, like millions of lifelong London commuters, have seen its decline in the past decade under this Government. I have seen an increase in squalor, overcrowding and crime and I have seen the extent to which people, particularly women, are frightened to travel at night.

There is no doubt that, whatever their political persuasion, Londoners have seen a public transport system which was the envy of the world decline to a state of sad and seedy squalor. As this is now the triumphant 10th anniversary of Thatcherism and as the decline has occurred in the decade of Thatcherism, one does not need to be a political scientist or an expert on the politics of transport to know where to point the finger of blame. The finger of blame for the squalor, decline and seediness of the underground system points squarely at the Government. Every London commuter knows that.

I want to raise three main points. I have been approached by some of my constituents and by members of the unions concerned to raise with the Minister the fact that on the very day of the King's Cross fire employees of London Regional Transport who tried to hand out leaflets to passengers explaining the safety problems on the London transport system—problems which have been fully justified and supported by the Fennell report—were disciplined for their pains. I also understand that in the aftermath of the Clapham accident employees were disciplined or threatened with disciplinary action for trying to raise those important safety issues.

I ask the Minister to respond to that claim, which was widely aired in the newspapers at the time, and to give the House an assurance that in the future no employee of LRT or British Rail will be disciplined for trying to bring to the public's attention the very real safety problems. There is nothing that members of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen or the National Union of Railwaymen have said about safety on London's transport system that is not amply borne out by the Fennell report.

We have listened to speeches from some Conservative Members claiming that the problem was not a lack of investment. However, as has been pointed out, even by some Conservative Members, the Government are boasting that their main response to the Fennell report is an investment of £266 million. One cannot square the fact that their response to the report is that much-needed shot of extra investment with the claim that investment was not the problem. If it was not a problem, why is there to be new investment? It is obvious to every traveller on the Underground that it is suffering from a lack of capital investment and revenue expenditure.

Only a Government with a fixed and dogmatic opposition to public expenditure and the public sector in general could deny that public expenditure and investment in public transport in the capital city ought to be the highest priority. The Government should be ashamed that public investment and public subsidy for our transport system in London have fallen so low. I should like the Minister at the Dispatch Box to defend that position. The level of investment and subsidy for London Transport is among the lowest in Europe.

The Secretary of State has made great claims about the new safety culture. That is not before time. I was horrified, in the same way as anybody who read the Fennell report must have been, to read that there was nothing explicitly about safety in the standing orders of either LRT or London Underground. That has now been rectified, but it was clear that until the tragedy which took so many lives the priority of the managements of LRT and London Underground was profit.

As the Secretary of State said, the lessons of the Fennell report go wider than London Underground. For a decade we have had a Government who say that the market and profit are all-important. They believe that the public sector, those who work in it and anything it does should be denigrated. Therefore, it is no surprise that we end up with public sector services in the poor state of London Underground today. The Government put mammon before everything and their motto, as J. Galbraith said, is public squalor and private riches. Therefore, it is no surprise that we had a terrible disaster such as that we saw at King's Cross.

Opposition Members hope, speaking for the millions of people in London who depend on public transport, that the terrible disaster has changed the Government's mind and forced them to focus on the importance of investment in the public sector together with the importance of public transport to London and a high level of subsidy. At the Dispatch Box today we have seen a Secretary of State who is perhaps, unfortunately, on his way out. Let us hope that the debate will encourage a new culture among the Government in which there is pride in public transport and the public sector. Let us hope that money for public transport is on its way.

8.8 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): What the debate ought to be about and what it is about are two different things. It should be about the points made in chapter 2, paragraph 14, of the Fennell report. It should be about finding the cause of the disaster. I stress the word "cause" rather than "blame" because those two words are also different. It should be about ensuring that such a tragedy never happens again. In fact, the debate has been about who is to blame and what produced the causes rather than about the causes themselves. That amounts simply to raking over the past for cheap party-political gain.

We should have been debating the importance of improving the future of our transport system and reassuring the travelling public. We should have been asking constructive questions such as whether the Fennell recommendations are the right recommendations to which we may wish to add—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has come back to listen because I listened to his speech. I did not try to interrupt him, so I hope that he will listen to what I have to say in the same spirit.

When I listened to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, I did not hear a single constructive comment.

It was a knocking job from start to finish and his message boiled down to an assertion that the Government were to blame for the tragedy and that cuts caused the fire. He is wrong on both counts but, as we have seen in the past, being wrong does not bother him a bit. Facts must not be allowed to stand in his way when he wants to kick about. The needs of the public must not be allowed to stand in his way when he is searching for a scapegoat.

Ms. Abbott: Will the hon. Gentleman cease his personal attacks on my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and turn to the issues raised by the Fennell report?

Mr. Wilshire: I am most grateful for that intervention. I would have thought that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) could have seen my notes here.

So far, we have heard nothing constructive from the Opposition—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] If Labour Members are prepared to press their case, I am prepared to examine it in exchange. Labour's case is founded on the concept of the Government being to blame for everything—any Government, not necessarily the present one. Apart from naked self-interest, why do Labour Members say that? The reason is simply that they are still hooked on a Socialist ideology. To a Socialist, when discussing matters such as the King's Cross fire, every problem is the fault of somebody else. To a Socialist, every solution must come from the nanny state. Socialists need to be able to blame the Government to justify the Government taking over and running our lives in future.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Will the hon. Gentleman cease his strictures on the nature of Socialism today and get back to the Fennell report? It is far from him to accuse us of not being constructive when all he has done is to attack my hon. Friends and Socialism. Let us hear about the Fennell report and safety for the people who use the London Underground.

Mr. Wilshire: I find such interventions fascinating. The Opposition are prepared to hand it out, but if someone tries to repay them in kind, they cannot take it.

Building on false foundations, the Labour party's detailed case on the report is equally flawed. Throughout the debate, Labour Members have been citing a lack of money. They have tried to ignore paragraph 3 in chapter 19. I shall quote it once again. It says:

> "In my judgment there is no evidence that the overall level of subsidy available to London Regional Transport was inadequate to finance necessary safety-related spending and maintain safety standards. I accept the evidence . . . that if funds were needed, funds were available."

Throughout the debate, Labour Members have ignored the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). When the inspector said:

> "I do not believe there was a shortage of money",

counsel for the National Union of Railwaymen said,

> "Quite so, Sir."

Labour Members have also ignored the huge boost in investment by the Government in the Underground system since the Greater London council lost control of it. The best they have been able to do is to try to muddy the water by pointing to subsidised fares in other European countries. Yet subsidised fares simply mean cheaper, not necessarily safer, journeys.

There are some issues in the report that arise out of the question of money. The report refers to the state of mind within London Regional Transport. If those managers began to take the view that there was no more money available, the Labour party should be feeling guilty, because it has been saying over and over again that there is no more money. Labour Members can hardly be surprised when people start to believe them.

The second issue raised in the report is that of under-spending. It is made clear that money was available for spending, but was not spent. That gives the lie to the claim that money was not available and also highlights, yet again, one of the classic weaknesses of public bureaucracies the world over, which is that they find it difficult to meet their spending targets.

Mr. Prescott: Of late, I have heard the hon. Gentleman saying that a privatised airport at Heathrow was not up to dealing with safety. His point about whether money could be saved was addressed by Dr. Ridley himself, who said that he did not spend the full amount of £5 million because of pressures from the board to save and contribute towards cutting costs. The hon. Gentleman would have seen that in the Fennell report if he had read it, instead of taking selected bits and speaking on them.

Mr. Wilshire: I have done my level best to digest all the facts and to listen to the nonsense spoken by the Opposition. The truth is in the report. There are ample instances of under-spending against allocations and a higher level of safety could have been achieved if the money had been spent. That is a classic case of what happens in a bureacracy.

The third lesson that I draw about money is the issue of management criteria. One telling example in the report is the comment made about using train miles as a measure of expenditure when passenger miles might have been a better yardstick. If we are to go down such an avenue and if we, as politicians, are to allow ourselves to be drawn into management details at that level, heaven help the travelling public. It is the worst possible action for politicians to meddle in detailed management.

The second plank in Labour's case is the lack of staff. Labour Members ignore another section of the Fennell report, paragraph 6 of Chapter 19, which says:

> "I found no evidence that the reduction in the number of operating or maintenance staff contributed directly to the disaster".

If there are any issues about staff numbers arising from the report, they concern staff attitudes, skills and training—in other words, they concern quality rather than quantity. Those are the areas covered by some of the most fundamental recommendations in the report.

The only response from the Labour party to such issues is that we should be spending more and that we should be employing more people. It just goes to show how little they have learnt in 10 years of opposition. I also find it interesting to notice what has not been said by the Opposition. What about the thrower of the match? We have heard nothing about him or her from Labour Members because it would not suit them to mention that point. If we start talking about individual responsibility or if we say that individual members of the public should show some initiative, we are doing the opposite of what the Labour party wants in this country. It is equally fascinating that Labour Members have said nothing about the staff who ignored the debris.

Mr. Dobson: I wish that the hon. Gentleman had read the report rather than the extracts supplied by the Government Front Bench. He would note that Mr. Fennell made it clear that no responsibility lay with what he regarded as the humble members of staff for the cause of the fire or anyone's response to it. Before the hon. Gentleman directs his attention to the weakest, the poorest and the most over-worked in his nasty, slanderous and unpleasant way, can he turn a little attention to his hon. Friends on the Front Bench? He should remember that they run a Department and are responsible for a railway inspectorate, which either ought to have known or did know about everything that was wrong with safety on London Regional Transport and which did nothing. That is confirmed in the report.

Mr. Wilshire: The great difficulty with an issue of this sort is that, to try to give it comprehensive coverage, we must tackle difficult and emotive subjects such as individual people and members of staff. Far be it for me to repeat what Labour Members have been saying all day. They are only points about the role of the Government, and they have been made time and again. It must fall to somebody to tackle the issues which, for whatever reason, Labour Members do not wish to be tackled. We must ask questions about individuals who throw matches and ignore smoking rules, and about individual people at work. Individual people at work are capable of showing initiative and of taking responsibility. Again, if people at their workplace do things of that sort, it is the exact opposite of what the Labour party wishes to see.

Mr. Dobson: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, with omniscience denied to the Fennell panel, the thrower of the match has been identified as a member of staff? That is the logic of his argument.

Mr. Wilshire: All I am suggesting is that the Labour party would have us believe that the Government must do something and that no one else need take any responsibility for what happens in this country. That is crazy.

Sixteen months ago, an awful tragedy took place in this country. The whole nation—every single one of us—shares the grief of all those who were bereaved. The whole nation shares the admiration for the rescue services that took part in dealing with the tragedy. The whole nation shares appreciation and respect for Desmond Fennell and the recommendations in his report. But the whole nation also shares my disgust at the Labour party's response to recent transport tragedies. Time and again, we have heard the same response. On transport matters, Labour Members increasingly appear like a flock of vultures, wheeling overhead waiting to swoop, and trying yet again to score cheap party political points. They are almost willing some other tragedy to happen so that they can blame the Government and, if possible, berate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. They should be ashamed of themselves.

8.22 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) spoke about individual responsibility. I disagree with the tone and content of his speech. For the first time in the House, I publicly disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). He rightly praised ambulance men and women, but he talked about the magnificent emergency services. Magnificent they could be, but, alas, the London ambulance service is far from magnificent. As a London Member, irrespective of his party, the hon. Member for Spelthorne has a public responsibility to do something about it.

I have had three Adjournment debates on the chaos that now exists in the London ambulance service. That chaos is caused by a lack of funding and the lack of the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Health. This debate is not about health; it is about the problems that arise from disasters. Individual ambulance men and firemen perform magnificently, but, in terms of back-up to the London ambulance service, for which he has a personal responsibility to the public and to the House, the hon. Gentleman should do something about the chaos. If he does not know about the chaos, I will tell him about it.

That brings me to the subject of the debate. On the terrible day after the King's Cross disaster I had the good or bad luck to put a written question to the Secretary of State for Transport, asking him to list the incidents on London underground railways which had caused risk to human life from electrical, mechanical or human failure. For too long before the King's Cross inquiry, London Members were concerned about the issue and were exercising their individual responsibilities to try to do something about it. I now put to the hon. Member for Spelthorne something which I hope that he will accept as wholly constructive. I also put an oral question to the Secretary that day. At the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester railway, a well-known Member of the House, the then Secretary of State for Trade, was killed. Since that day the House has properly been concerned with railway safety.

During the 19th century, a series of regulations were adopted, first by the then Board of Trade and then by the Department of Transport and its inspectorate, which established a threshold to protect human life. If one did that on the basis of free market economics, it would probably be worthwhile for aircraft operators or London Transport to pay out large sums of money for compensation to balance the additional safety costs. Hon. Members rightly believe that market forces should not operate in such matters. I hope that I take the hon. Member for Spelthorne with me in that respect. I wish to operate in the spirit of cross-party accord. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree with me when it comes to aeroplanes or other forms of mechanical transport.

We are told that safety should have been uppermost in the minds of the operators. It is in the Act, even if it was not in the long, additional and unnecessary instruments which the then Secretary of State, the present Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), brought forward. As we know from the Fennell report, there was no item on the agenda of any board meeting in which safety was mentioned. That is remarkable. Underground railways are endemically liable to fire. They are full of high tension and low tension electric currents, and insulation can break down. There are accumulations of rubbish and building adjustments—such as those at Tottenham Court road—where fire originates. There are false draughts, chimney effects and the damaging effect of smoke underground. All that has been known for 70 or 80 years, yet, for reasons which I cannot understand, safety was not a regular item of report at board meetings.

That is rather surprising, in view of the number of underground fires. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) said that there were 1,000, particularly on escalators. From the Fennell report we learnt that, in 1944, an escalator at Paddington was gutted by fire. It was known that escalators, particularly the type at King's Cross, were an endemic risk, and sprinklers were fitted to try to minimise it. The Fennell report tells us that sprinklers were originally switched on every day to keep things damp. It was then found that they corroded the mechanism, so the practice was changed to once every fortnight. Paragraph 15 of chapter 7 of the report states:

"As a compromise it became the practice to apply the water fog about once a fortnight. In recent years however the water fog equipment has not been operated regularly."

I was sorry that Fennell did not investigate that matter and ask why it was not operated regularly. I will not say that, if the supervisors at King's Cross knew where the valves were and that if the valves had been operated regularly, it might have been enough to dampen the fire. It was certainly an important link in the chain of the cause and events of the fire. It is a chain of events with about 14 sequences. If any one of them had been broken, the fire would not have occurred. Therefore, I am sorry that the Fennell report does not examine that matter to the degree that it might, particularly as it was recognised after the Tottenham Court road and Oxford Circus fires that passenger safety was at risk.

A report from the London Passenger Transport Research Group—"Passenger Safety and Protection from Fire on London's Tube Railways"—which was published on 15 February 1985, said:

"By definition, inadequate precautions against fire and smoke is unsafe practice. Since Oxford Circus there have been other instances where deep-level LRT tube stations have been temporarily closed because of fires, one of which was in the escalator shaft at Green Park, another busy central London station. This incident blocked the final means of exit from the Piccadilly Line platforms precisely the danger that the London fire regulations seek to avoid by insisting on two means of exit. An alternative way out was fortunately available at Green Park, through a lengthy passageway from the Victoria Line. But if the fire had broken out in the combined Piccadilly and Bakerloo escalator shaft at Piccadilly Circus . . .

In recent years, London Transport, now London Regional Transport, have been extremely fortunate that no lives have been lost in fires on the Underground. There is little doubt that a major catastrophe was averted at Oxford Circus owing to the initiative and quick actions of the Underground's staff.

Luck has a habit of running out."

Well, two years later luck did run out. We have to acknowledge that that was due partly to lax management, for the reasons that I have outlined.

But I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that there was another factor. He may have knowledge of business and may agree that in business—certainly any business that I have known—the people who are listened to and the people who are promoted are the ones who go with the current trend. They may be concerned with installing computers, with a new type of marketing, with some new idea that has come out from some college, or with some technique that has only just been discovered. At any rate, these specialists suddenly shoot to the top. For good reasons or bad, London Regional Transport was being asked to cut costs.

I put it to the hon. Member for Spelthorne that the atmosphere at that time will have been helpful to those with bright ideas about how to reduce costs. Such people will perhaps have been promoted, having been investigating that particular frontier of activity. Those who could produce ideas for cutting costs will have been listened to, and promoted above others, because that was the aim of the organisation at that time. Indeed, the preoccupation of the board was probably not at all with running the railway as it was; the board was looking ahead at financial matters and all sorts of things. I suggest that that is the psychology of the situation that we all experience in one way or another, and I challenge the Minister to deny it.

Mr. Dobson: Does my hon. Friend not agree that information that came to me by way of a leaked early draft of the London Regional Transport business plan made this clear by saying that there was no scope for efficiency savings last year because the money had to be spent on safety?

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for underlining the point. This is where I hope I can take both sides of the House with me.

The Minister will agree that this House, on advice from the railway inspectorate, must set the standards below which public safety cannot be allowed to go. We all agree with the fire regulations in regard to cinemas and shops. At one time there were no such regulations, but we insisted on them. I challenge the Minister to say that the railway inspectorate, or any equivalent, is part of the nanny state. It is not; it is part of the way in which the public protects itself. The public protects itself with an ambulance service and a fire service, as well as sound standards of operation on the railways. I am not sure that at present we have got all three right. In any case, that is not the nanny state; it is just public protection of life. I hope that the Minister is with me on that point.

We now have to ask ourselves whether the lessons of King's Cross have been learned. I am afraid that they have not. On 13 March I pointed out to the Minister for Public Transport the number of shortcomings still existing in London Regional Transport. Indeed, I have heard of some more. I understand—this is subject to checking—that the covering of footbridges, to prevent people from chucking stuff over the top, has been postponed. I understand that walking of the track has been reduced, even in the last few months. Certainly there are threats of still lower manning levels in the central London stations—something that is surely quite wrong. In a detailed letter to the Minister, I referred to the one-person operation of deep tube railways in London. I believe that that is inherently dangerous. It increases risk. It puts another weak link in the chain of the protection of life, and that is something on which Members on both sides of the House can agree.

On 19 November 1987 I asked the then Secretary of State for Transport, who, I am sorry to note, has just gone, a question following his statement on the King's Cross tragedy of the previous day. I said:

"Does he agree that in striking a balance that is always present between efficiency and safety, the regulations and management decisions inherent in that balance should receive the widest possible consent and agreement between those employed on the underground and those who travel on it?", the people who travel on it being us. To his great credit, the Secretary of State immediately said:

"I am sure that as a general statement that must be right."
—[*Official Report*, 19 November 1987; Vol. 122, c.1207.]

But we have not got that. There is not that general consent about the balance between efficiency and safety that any Government, of any party, of any Parliament in the world,

[Mr. Spearing]

surely requires of its public services, whether publicly owned or privately owned. That is one of the problems that the Government have got themselves into.

Until recently the referees were the railway inspectorate, somewhat at arm's length from the Board of Trade or the Department of Transport. It could say to the LNER, or to the Midland Railway, or to London Transport, or to the old Metropolitan Railway, that it must do this, this and this. But now we have people determining the running of the railways on the basis of commercial objectives, as is illustrated by that infamous letter from the then Secretary of State, who was also responsible for setting the standards. I believe that in a democracy that is an unacceptable conflict of interests. It has been suggested that the railway inspectorate might be transferred to the Health and Safety Executive, or at least away from the Secretary of State for Transport. There is an argument for that. It must be possible to demonstrate independence, but I believe that that lesson has not yet been learned. If it had been, there would at least have been a halt in the extension of one-person operation on the deep-level tubes in London, and there would be a better staff relationship.

It must be pointed out that the industrial problems that may emerge yet again on the London Underground are not a matter of pay and conditions, but have to do with the very thing that the Secretary of State left out—investment in human quality. He is right to say that the system is dependent on human beings, but I do not think that the relationship between the management and the workers of London Underground is as it should be. It has declined disastrously, even since King's Cross.

In conclusion, irrespective of our view about management, about funding or about ownership, the standards that we want to see inserted by law, by a technically competent body, in this mode of transport have not been inserted. They must be seen to be inserted and supervised, and they must have the confidence of those employees who operate the service and, above all, of those who represent the travelling public. It is quite clear that, despite what has happened since King's Cross, that confidence does not exist on either side of this House.

8.39 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): At this stage in the debate there is a danger of repetition, which I shall try to avoid, especially because at least two other hon. Members wish to speak and I do not want to crowd them out.

One of the measures of a civilised city is that it has a good public transport network—I take that phrase to include a safe public transport network. Like most other hon. Members who have spoken, I have Underground stations in my constituency. In fact, I have three and the Underground is therefore a main means of travel for my constituents. They have a natural concern about safety issues, over and above the normal human feeling that we all felt on the night of that dreadful tragedy.

I join virtually every hon. Member who has spoken in congratulating those who produced the Fennell report. This must be one of the rare occasions when we have produced an unusual animal—a popular barrister. However, the praise that has been heaped on Mr. Fennell has been well deserved.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has rightly instructed the new chairman of LRT to give top priority to implementing the new safety measures and again that will be welcomed by all hon. Members. The sum of £266 million may trip off the tongue and has been much quoted, but it is a big sum to be given over the next three years and is ample evidence that safety is a top priority.

First, I want to put a small point to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport. Although I have put it to him previously, this is a good opportunity to repeat it. Several hon. Members who have spoken today—and many others—represent areas that are not in Greater London. Hon. Members who represent Greater London know that rates bills have recently leapt up considerably as a result of the LRT charge, the main element of which related to the improved safety measures. I have no complaint about the improved safety measures nor, I judge, has a single one of my constituents. However, it seems a little perverse to expect the full cost to fall on the residents of the London boroughs and none of it on, say, the people of Epping Forest, Chelmsford or many parts of Hertfordshire, or those who are just visiting London. In addition, as many tourists visit London, the Underground must be regarded as a national rather than a uniquely local system. Therefore, I ask my hon. Friend again to review the spread of the percentages.

The second thing that I want to stress is the whole question of public safety information. Hon. Members will know of my long attachment to the need of promoting access to information both in local government—I refer to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, which I introduced—and in a whole range of areas, relating especially to safety. Paragraph 21 of chapter 19 of the Fennell report is worth quoting. It states:

> "I view with dismay the suggestion that information gained by a statutory authority which has a bearing on the safety of the public using a system for mass transportation should not be made publicly available. The travelling public have a right to know about the safety arrangements made by transport operators and the safety of places in which they habitually gather."

I emphasise those points because over the years when I have pressed for greater access to information, I have been told, "The public won't know", or "The public won't care", or even, "If you give them that information, they may be alarmed." However, if we want the public to be better educated and to have, for example, a better means of measuring risk, we cannot deny them the means by which they will be better educated. We cannot cosset them and say at the same time that we expect them to be answerable for their decisions because they have no way of being able to know the facts if the facts are suppressed and kept from them.

I take issue briefly with some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench. On more than one occasion recently he has said—this was echoed by his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)—that there is an exact equation between becoming more efficient and cost effective on the one hand, and cutting safety on the other. There must be no such equation, and in a well-run organisation there will not be one. It is akin to saying that it is impossible to run a profitable manufacturing company if one has to take account of environmental controls. One must take account of environmental controls and doing so is an essential payment for that business, just like heat and light, or

wages. It would be extraordinary if we became hooked on the belief that it is wrong to be cost-effective and to seek to make large undertakings more efficient because along the way they would ditch safety because, particularly in a transport undertaking, safety is a sine qua non of the operation.

I have two main concerns for my constituents and both impinge on safety issues. The first has already been touched on—the existing congestion. We must increase the number of trains and carriages and lengthen the platforms. Perhaps there could be new lines, but above all we need cleaner trains and stations. We want an Underground system to be proud of. We want one that attracts people to travel on it rather than making them feel that they are going through some sort of mangle twice a day just to go about their ordinary work.

My second concern relates to the safety of the individual. Because of its length it is difficult to read the report in detail, but I am appalled when I hear that surveys of travellers have shown a high fear of travelling on trains and on the Underground, especially at night and especially among women. I am not surprised by that, but I find it appalling. It is an unacceptable fear and, in passing, I should add that, financially, it is a silly position to be in. It may well be that people's perceptions do not represent the true position. People tend to exaggerate fear and the true danger that they face may be less, but it is the perception that matters because that is the factor that determines the way in which people do or do not travel. I should like the Underground to do much more in the next few years to increase protection for the traveller. I welcome unreservedly the investment in machinery and in mechanical means, such as personal radios, which have been mentioned. However, we must tackle the ghastly situation which deters women in particular from travelling on our great rail network late at night.

In conclusion—I promised to be brief—I believe that safety was not given sufficient prominence under the previous London Underground management and that that clearly contributed to the King's Cross tragedy. Most of the Fennell report recommendations have already been accepted and are already being implemented to the broad approval of hon. Members of all parties. However, as the report makes clear, it is a gross calumny to suggest that the accident was caused by a shortage of Government funds. It was caused by an excess of bad management.

8.47 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The fact that the debate has been dominated so far by hon. Members representing London constituencies should not be allowed to obscure the importance of the accident at King's Cross as being of national rather than simply metropolitan significance. The transport system of the capital city must be safe, not only for its residents but for citizens of the whole kingdom. That is especially the case for a main line railway station that serves the whole of the north and the east of the United Kingdom. Indeed, it is possible to travel direct to King's Cross from my constituency.

In this most lucid report, Mr. Fennell, who does not seem to have been regarded with the same enthusiasm for his remarks as leader of the Bar in response to the Lord Chancellor's Green Paper, expressly said that he was not engaged in a prosecution. However, in effect, he handed down an indictment and had I been prosecuting on that indictment I would not have expected the jury to leave the court before returning a verdict.

In my judgment, the single most important sentence of the report is in paragraph 14 of chapter 1, where Mr. Fennell states:

"it is my view that a disaster was foreseeable."

Foreseeability is a test of negligence and if the events were foreseeable, the absence of steps to prevent them was clearly negligent. When the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) said that, although a disaster was foreseeable, the scale of the disaster was not foreseeable, he seemed unconsciously perhaps to make precisely the point that ought to be made about the report and about the attitude of London Underground. If the scale of a disaster is not foreseeable, that is all the more reason for taking steps to prevent any accident occurring. The notable feature of what Mr. Fennell found was that London Underground took precautions about outbreaks of fire but did not seem to have a philosophy that compelled it to take steps to prevent fire.

The truth is that the accident could have occurred on many previous occasions and could have caused the deaths of many more people. Why is that? Because London Underground took the view that fires were inevitable and did not take steps to prevent them. As Mr. Fennell found, London Underground had a blind spot about the hazard of fire on escalators. He also found that no one person was charged with overall responsibility for safety. For example, the director of operations and the director of engineering each thought that he was responsible for safety in his own division, but principally for the safety of his own staff.

The accident could have occurred before because specialist safety staff were in junior positions and were concerned with the safety of staff and not passengers. It could have occurred before because there was no system to train staff in fire drill or evacuation procedures. Of course, in London Underground, prior to the events with which the report is concerned, fires were described by the somewhat disingenuous euphemism of "smouldering". It was accepted that describing them in that way inevitably created a false sense of security. All of those defects were exhibited on the occasion of the tragic fire with which we have been concerned, when the response of the staff was described by Mr. Fennell as unco-ordinated, haphazard and untrained.

The purpose of the debate is to consider wherein lay the responsibility for those matters. If money was not a bar to putting into effect appropriate safety procedures, it makes all the more acute the negligence that gave rise to the accident that caused the deaths. Under the London Regional Transport Act 1984 responsibility for safety was laid on LRT. It believed that it could discharge that responsibility by delegating it to London Underground —an action of which Mr. Fennell expressly disapproved.

We are also entitled to ask, what of the Department of Transport and its Ministers? In the letter of 20 July 1984, to which reference has been made several times in the debate, four tasks were laid upon LRT in relation to Underground services—to improve the services, to reduce costs, to involve the private sector and to promote better management—but no mention was made of safety anywhere within the four corners of that letter. If safety is paramount now, why was it not paramount then?

[Mr. Menzies Campbell]

The performance of those tasks must have been monitored by officials of the Department of Transport and also by Ministers. Why did no one ask about safety? Why did no one ask whether those tasks could be accomplished without prejudicing safety? One is entitled to ask what consideration the Department of Transport, through its Ministers or its officials, gave to the safety of the oldest Underground system in the world. If they gave none, in the light of the palpable and obvious defects which Mr. Fennell recites in his report, why did they not give consideration to those issues? If the negligence is as obvious as has been rehearsed in the report, why was it not brought to the attention of Ministers? Why did Ministers not seek out information of that kind for themselves?

It would be churlish to do other than welcome all the improvements that have taken place and that are proposed. But I ask myself again, if these improvements are now so obvious, why were they not obvious before the accident? Mr. Fennell has provided the answer to that question. He said that the accident was foreseeable. The disaster was foreseeable by London Underground, by London Regional Transport, by the Department of Transport and also by Ministers. On the occasion of this solemn debate the House is entitled to ask itself whether Ministers truly discharged the duties which their office laid upon them.

8.54 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I must first apologise to the House for not being here at the beginning of the debate. Two constituents had appointments to see me.

I want to concentrate on the workings of the Victoria line, which runs through King's Cross and also serves my constituency. Indeed, the last two stations at the northern end of the line—Blackhorse Road and Walthamstow Central—lie in my constituency. When the line was built 20 years ago, it was supposed to be fully automatic, fast and efficient, giving an excellent service from one end to the other. I am sorry to have to say that it no longer provides that fast and efficient service. A sizeable proportion of my postbag from constituents is composed of complaints about the Victoria line.

London Regional Transport is doing its best to maintain the escalators. However, the escalators at both stations in my constituency have been out of action for a considerable time. When I visited the constituency the other day, I was horrified to find that both escalators at Walthamstow Central were out of action. One was even denied the pleasure of trying to run up the downward escalator. If escalators are not working, it has implications for safety. When people have to carry heavy shopping, children and pushchairs down the stairs, there is obviously capacity for trouble. It only needs a toddler to trip on the top step and there may be disaster.

I have had several meetings with officials from London Underground. I have said to them, "Why not be sensible? If an escalator is out of action, you should put up a notice to say why it is out of action and how long it will be before it is fixed." They said, "What a good idea." The next time I went to my constituency they had indeed erected a sign. It said, "This escalator will be back in action on 28 January." It was not. They put up another sign saying, "This escalator will be back in action on 3 February." It was not. The following day the notice disappeared completely. I wish that someone would drive the lesson home to London Underground that if it is going to go through exercises in public relations, it has to get them right; otherwise the public will be cynical, and say, "All their efforts are in vain. Why don't they get on and fix the escalator"?

Overcrowding has been mentioned several times. Overcrowding is highly dangerous. Anyone who uses the tube as much as I do for my journeys to and from Walthamstow Central has to use Victoria station. There is no option; one has to change there to get on to the Victoria line. On one occasion both escalators were out of action and the overcrowding had to be seen to be believed. With the press of people on the platform and trains discharging more all the time, the passengers could not get out of the station. Overcrowding is mentioned in the report. The management of London Underground has not addressed that problem sufficiently.

One more thing about the Victoria line got my goat the other day. I received a press release saying that London Underground was putting one more train on the Victoria line. I read it and said to myself, "Wow, one more train on the Victoria line, great stuff." It also said, "We will no longer be stopping at King's Cross." The usual euphemism is "change" or something similar. In other words, it kicks the passengers off and makes them wait for the next northbound train. It said that that would no longer happen and I thought to myself, "What a good thing." However—the House will not believe it—on my next southbound journey, the driver came on the intercom and said, "Everybody out at Warren Street". I have lived in London for 10 years and never in my experience has a train going southbound on the Victoria line stopped and kicked out the passengers at Warren Street. Clearly, LRT has said, "We will not kick them out at King's Cross, but we will get our own back and kick them out at Warren Street instead".

The state of the Central line is a disgrace. It is the most appalling line. I always try to avoid it if I can. I would much rather use the District line. Sometimes, however, I must use the Central line. I hear the trains arrive with that characteristic iron rattle. They are covered with graffiti on the outside and on the inside. All the people on the inside seem to look revolting as well. I am not sure whether they take on the characteristics of the train in which they are travelling. On one occasion I saw a couple of yobs smoking in the carriage. I thought of saying to them, "You should not be smoking. It is dangerous." Then I had another look at them and thought to myself that I still have all my own teeth so I would not take the chance.

What we need is more staff on the trains to look after the passengers. We do not need the staff sitting in those little boxes collecting tickets, looking thoroughly bored and not caring a damn if someone puts down 20p and makes a bolt for the exit. Staff should be on the trains looking after the passengers, and that, I fear, is where London Underground management is going wrong.

I know that one more hon. Member wishes to speak. I believe that he has been in his place since the start of the debate, so I will sit down at this point and give the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) the opportunity to play his Brent harp.

9.3 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) missed the opening remarks of the Secretary of State. We have heard the hon. Gentleman's explanation as to why he was not here, and, of course, one accepts them wholeheartedly. I assure him, however, that he did not miss much, because there was nothing new in what the Secretary of State said and still less anything memorable. However, there were some new buzz words, which will last in our memories, if not in fact, for some time. Those words were "safety culture". Of course, the old buzz words were also about culture, about the "enterprise culture". We are debating a report that came out of events which took place sadly and tragically when the enterprise culture had the Underground system in its grip. Of course, in the enterprise culture public ownership is bad, and, if possible, public investment is to be avoided, and public regulation is to be minimised. Those are the characteristics of the enterprise culture.

Second to the enterprise culture—an afterthought coming out of this tragic incident—we have the concept of the safety culture. Our concern is that the safety culture should not be subordinated to the enterprise culture. If there is one thing that we have learnt from these tragic events, it is the deadly danger of subordinating safety to enterprise. In a Socialist definition of enterprise, safety and concern for the environment go hand in hand with efficiency and growth. I say to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) that the Opposition make no apology for talking about the importance of safety and putting that first, because without safety there is nothing.

If the new buzz words "safety culture" are to mean anything, we would say that they must be based on two critical matters, both of which were highlighted in Mr. Fennell's laudable report. The first, importantly, is the encouragement of workers and management at every level to be involved in and committed to the safety process. The second is information. Information should be made available to the workers, to middle and lower management and to staff at every level within the enterprise of London Underground, but, above all and importantly, information should be made available to the general public. Without that information, there is no way in which safety can be monitored and preserved in the interests of safety first.

We want from Ministers tonight a clear indication that they accept those two basic principles. If they do not, and if they hedge around, those words "safety culture" will be no more than words in the mouth of a Minister under attack and fighting for his political career. We want more than that.

I am afraid that there are indications at this time that the lessons have not been learnt by London Underground. I want to raise one specific matter that is vital not only to the Underground system but, I believe, to the welfare of my constituents. It relates to a matter that is directly of concern to them and to me as users of Alperton station. We are reminded of what Mr. Fennell said about the travelling public's right to know about safety arrangements made by transport operators and of the importance of them knowing about the safety of places in which they habitually gather. One would have thought that that lesson would have been learnt. However, lo and behold, there is now in existence traffic circular No. 11, which was published by London Underground on 20 March. That is London Underground under new management which we have been told has been cleansed and adheres to the lessons of Fennell.

What does that traffic circular say and how, more importantly, is it prefaced? It is prefaced with these words: "PRIVATE: not for publication". No safety document produced by London Regional Transport should ever again be prefaced by those words. Nothing about safety in the Underground should ever be outside the public domain. Unless the Ministers can assure us that there never will be again anything about safety in London's Underground that is outside the public domain, all they have said counts for nothing.

The circular gives details of the arrangements for the inspection of escalators for fire and smoke. Paragraph E12 says:

> "The escalators shown below must be inspected every two hours for signs of fire or smoke. This is because they do not meet a necessary standard of cleanliness."

I see that the Minister is looking perturbed, as well he might. He should give us an undertaking that he will publish that traffic circular and lay it in the Library of the House, because we are entitled to know what it says.

Having listed those escalators that have to be inspected every two hours because they do not meet the necessary standard of cleanliness, the circular gives an even longer list of other Underground stations where the escalators or lifts are either completely out of operation or have had to be reduced because of safety and because of the failure of those stations to comply with the necessary safety standards. After the publication of the Fennell report and these tragic events, why are such circulars still published?

The circular gives another list of stations that have no escalators at all, and that list contains Alperton station on the Piccadilly line in my constituency. I used the escalator in the station just a few days ago, and on numerous occasions I have raised safety issues about its operation. But apparently Alperton station does not have an escalator. For years I and tens of thousands of my constituents have been travelling steadily up towards the platform on something that does not exist. According to traffic circular No. 11 of 20 March, which is private and not for publication, that escalator has no substance. We want answers about why such a document was produced. Either I and thousands of my constituents have been under an illusion about that escalator all these years, or Ministers are under an illusion tonight.

9.11 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): With a few notable exceptions, the debate has been conducted in the serious and responsible manner that the House expects for a matter of such personal tragedy and public importance as the fire at the King's Cross Underground station. In winding up for the Opposition, I join the many hon. Members who have expressed sympathy to the bereaved and injured and admiration for the emergency services. We especially commend the bravery of Police Constable Hanson and the bravery and sacrifice of Station Officer Colin Townsley whose family live in my borough of Lewisham. Despite the passage of time, I am conscious of the fact that for survivors and the bereaved alike, life can never be quite the same again. Tragically, many may still relive their torment through having to pursue wholly unnecessary court actions in order to gain the compensation to which they are entitled.

[Ms. Joan Ruddock]

As hon. Members have said, in comparison with other modes of transport London Underground is a very safe system. I concede that that is true, especially when compared with the appalling daily loss of life on our roads. At the heart of our debate is the consciousness, perhaps the consensus, that the tragic loss of life and injury in the King's Cross fire could probably have been prevented. As Mr. Fennell said on page 17 of his report:

"it is important to note that the circumstances in which the fire could develop all arose from the condition of the escalator on that night. Thus it is my view that a disaster was foreseeable."

By delaying the debate on the Fennell report, the Government put themselves in a position whereby the Secretary of State was able to come to the House today with a list of the many positive steps taken by London Regional Transport and London Underground Ltd. We do not complain about that. We are delighted that progress has been made, but it would have been quite wrong for that satisfaction to deflect us from a critical evaluation of the report's findings and from the wider issues arising from the tragedy itself.

Anyone who has read the report cannot but be appalled at the complacency of management about the occurrence of fires in the Underground system and the unpreparedness of staff at all levels in the face of an emergency such as that which occurred on 18 November 1987. Today the Secretary of State reminded us of the age and complexity of the London Underground system, 80 per cent. of which is more than 70 years old. It has 260 miles of track and 130 underground stations. Of course those facts are not new. They were well known to the Government when they decided to assume responsibility for the underground system through the creation in 1984 of London Regional Transport.

The Secretary of State's letter of 20 July to the chairman of London Regional Transport, to which a number of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) who made an outstanding contribution, referred, shows a total lack of concern for the safety problems that might arise in a system of that age and complexity and in which passenger demand was already growing. I shall re-emphasise what my colleagues said about the contents of the letter. Improvements were to be made within the resources available. Costs and the call on ratepayers' and taxpayers' money were to be reduced and services were to be privatised. It is quite clear from the Fennell report that at the highest level in London Regional Transport and London Underground Ltd. those objectives were vigorously pursued.

At that highest level was Dr. Tony Ridley, the chairman and chief executive of London Underground. In evidence to the inquiry he described how he set about changing not just the structure but the culture of London Underground when he took over in 1980. Whatever Dr. Ridley's laudable aims might have been at the outset, it seems highly improbable that his objectives were not influenced by Government attitudes from 1984 onwards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) was right to talk about a financial climate influencing decision-making relevant to safety. Ministers' attitudes to the financing of London Underground have been paraded annually in the House during debates on London ratepayers' contributions. I remind the House that two thirds of the £286·6 million grant to LRT this year will come from London's ratepayers. In the debates on the ratepayers' levy in 1985, 1986 and 1987 the matter of safety did not once pass the lips of Ministers. They were preoccupied with efficiency, unit costs and savings. In 1986 the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) said that LRT's aim was

"to secure better services and an improved passenger environment . . . by reducing costs in all areas. Cost-cutting is the key to LRT's success."—[*Official Report*, 28 January, 1986; Vol. 90, c. 902.]

Even more astonishing is the letter sent to London Members just two weeks after the King's Cross fire. In that letter the Minister of State boasted again of the reducing burden on London's ratepayers brought about by cost reduction. He produced figures to show that public subsidy was to be reduced year by year. The significance of all that lies in the style and priorities of management that were created by that financial climate. Nothing in the Fennell report contradicts that hypothesis.

I shall now deal with the escalator evidence about which my hon. Friends have spoken. Mr. Styles, the lift and escalator engineer, told the inquiry that staff were much occupied between 1985 and 1986 in getting the new management system running in preparation for competitive tendering. He acknowledged that he did not succeed in monitoring escalator cleaning standards to his satisfaction and that he did not have enough staff to do so. The maintenance manager said that the organisational changes had the effect of delaying improvements in the arrangements for escalator cleaning. We cannot dismiss, as Conservative Members would have us do, the importance of those statements, because Mr. Fennell found that the condition of the escalators made the tragedy possible. Even so, to anyone who has not read appendix J of the report or heard the speeches of my hon. Friends, it might appear that only through the tragedy of the King's Cross fire have we been able to learn lessons about the escalators. As the Secretary of State knows all too well, that is not so.

Mr. Fennell refers to 46 serious escalator fires on the Underground, and in 32 of them the cause was established or attributed to smokers' materials. But did LRT learn the lesson? Unhappily, it did not. Appendix J shows how devastating its complacency was and how ineffective the inspectorate was in changing London Underground's priorities. The Minister will need to be extremely determined if he is to ensure that there is, as he promises, a lasting change in attitudes in London Underground.

The House should take note of the analysis of six escalator fires which occurred between the major Oxford Circus fire of November 1984 and the King's Cross fire of November 1987. In one case after another, smokers' materials and accumulated rubbish and/or wooden panels were implicated. Time and again, similar recommendations were made about better cleaning of escalators, replacing wood, use of water fog and alerting the fire brigade.

What does the Minister think were the preoccupations of management that they failed to heed those findings? How does he explain the fact that the internal inquiry which followed a serious escalator fire at Green Park in June 1987 found the same probable causes—a discarded

cigarette end or match—and made the same recommendations as were made when fire broke out on the same escalator two years previously?

Mr. Fennell said, and Conservative Members have repeated today, that he found no evidence that reduction in operating or maintenance staff contributed directly to the disaster. Furthermore, he judged, there was no evidence that the overall level of subsidy was inadequate. As we know, he chose not to take all that evidence. But he questioned the priorities of how the available resources were allocated, and it remains our contention that the cost-cutting priorities of the Government conditioned the management ethos of London Underground Ltd.

How else can anyone explain why, when serious escalator fires occurred year after year since LRT's inception, and internal inquiries recommended obvious but costly changes, the escalator manager should say that he did not press for changes because he felt that there was only "a thin chance" of them being authorised? Why, when one inquiry after another implicated smoking materials and waste in escalator fires and recommended better cleaning, does the Minister think the cleaning establishment was reduced? Was it not just to save money, regardless of the consequences? And why, within an aging system carrying unprecedented numbers of passengers, should there have been an underspend of £1·4 million in the lift and escalator department in 1987-88?

Mr. Fennell's report concludes that management complacency towards fires resulted in lack of action. We cannot contest that, but neither can the Secretary of State escape his responsibilities. Why did he not ask just how was so much money being saved?

That brings me to further consideration of the balance of responsibilities between the chairman of LRT, Sir Keith Bright, and the chairman and chief executive of London Underground, Dr. Tony Ridley. As the House will recall, both men resigned on the eve of the publication of the Fennell report. It later transpired, however, that Dr. Ridley for some months after his resignation—until he took up his new post at Eurotunnel—continued to use his executive facilities at London Underground Ltd. Furthermore, in a recent settlement, he received £30,000 and protected pension rights.

I can only deduce from those facts that Dr. Ridley's contract with London Underground Ltd., which provided for such perks, was honoured. That begs the question whether the Secretary of State considered Dr. Ridley to be in breach of his contract. It strongly suggests that he did not. Will the Minister now say whether he accepts that his Department's cost-cutting priorities affected Dr. Ridley's prime duty to run a safe railway? That question must be answered. Who was really responsible?

I come to the question of the implementation of the recommendations of the Fennell report. The Secretary of State welcomed the setting up by London Underground of the safety audit, and we join wholeheartedly with him in that welcome. But as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, Mr. Fennell called for more. He suggested that further consideration should be given to a review of the railway inspectorate. He suggested that perhaps it should become part of a passenger safety inspectorate.

What is the Minister's attitude to that? Does he favour such a proposal, or is it still his view that, despite all that has happened, his Department should continue to be responsible for the railway inspectorate? If it is, what changes does he expect to bring about in the inspectorate to ensure that there is a change of attitude and that never again will that cosy relationship exist between the inspectorate and part of the service that it is supposed to inspect?

Nobody will be satisfied by the attitude that was expressed in the letter, so much quoted today, of the chief inspector to the chief officer of London fire brigade. As that letter has not been read in full, I will quote from it. In the letter, which was with reference to Heathrow central station and its pedestrian subways, the chief inspector wrote:

"You may or may not be correct in your legal assertions"—

dealing with the question of certification for the station—

"and certainly, not to put too fine a point on it, there are those who believe that your definition of 'building structure' etcetera is hardly applicable to a concrete hole in the ground."

That is the kind of attitude that we cannot accept from an inspectorate that is responsible for public safety within the Underground system.

It will be clear to the Minister from the contributions of my hon. Friends that there is still much cause for concern. In the financial year just ended—the figures have been provided by London Underground—there were 4,038 reported fires on London Underground. Of those, 135, or more than two a week, were on escalators, and 36 of those escalator fires were serious enough to have to be put out by the London fire brigade.

The travelling public rightly considers that this is a situation in which real hazards exist. Many feel a deep sense of unease, if not fear, whenever trains stop inexplicably in tunnels or smoke can be smelled at stations. Opposition Members remain deeply concerned about the many changes being brought about by London Underground against this background of perceived and real risk.

A number of my hon. Friends have referred to the Underground ticketing system and the intense level of public concern about safety in relation to the gates. Our confidence was not much boosted when we received the Minister's letter telling us about the possible failure of the emergency system about which previously he had given us much reassurance.

The Minister had been asked repeatedly if all the ticket gates would automatically be opened in the event of a power failure. He said in good faith that that was his understanding. We were reassured then, although we still had objections about the gates. However, in another letter he wrote:

"LUL tell me that a circumstance has come to light in which this might not happen."

On receiving that letter I assumed that someone who was currently reviewing the system had worked out from some first principles of physics that that might occur. It was extraordinary therefore to find that the Minister was not telling us about a theoretical possibility, but about something that really happened.

Mr. Hanley: In the circumstances that the hon. Lady has just described about the gates not being opened, will she admit that one in three of the gates at most might not be able to be opened? Does she accept that there is a full implementation programme to ensure that those gates are fully repaired over the next three months and that there are numerous safety devices to ensure that all gates can be opened by alternative means should the need arise?

Ms. Ruddock: The public will not be reassured by the hon. Gentleman's comments. The prospect of three out of every 10 gates not opening in an emergency is horrifying. Although the hon. Gentleman referred to alternative provisions, he must be reminded that the only alternative is for a human being to be present to observe the situation and to deal with it. Much of our criticism has been aimed at staff cuts and the lack of transport staff eyes and ears to identify a difficult situation.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): To reinforce my hon. Friend's point, is she aware that this morning at the Barbican station—a station at which the gates have been in operation for only three weeks—three of the gates were inoperable? The staff were busily trying to direct passengers who were arriving from trains through one gate and passengers arriving to catch trains through another. That caused absolute chaos. Those gates are simply very dangerous in an emergency.

Ms. Ruddock: Many passengers travelling on LRT today will have experienced similar difficulties.

I am sure that the Minister is as aware as I am that the fire brigade believes that section 12 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 is but a stop-gap measure. The fire brigade is looking forward to full certification. Will there be full certification? Will it cover all the stations in the London Underground system? If that means that there will be greater costs for any changes which must be made, will the Government guarantee that the money will be available?

The Minister must acknowledge that urgent action is required because of the way in which the fire brigade could predict these tragic events. Is the Minister satisfied about co-operation and progress with his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, given that a special working party set up in 1985 to consider fires underground did not meet until a few weeks before the 1987 tragedy? Can he assure us that no fire fighter will now be sent to an underground fire with plastic over-trousers or the PVC gloves which melted so horribly at King's Cross? What progress is being made with the provision of new breathing sets, given that the heat and stress at King's Cross caused fire fighters to exhaust their air supplies in 17 minutes instead of the planned 36 to 40 minutes? Will he now instruct London Underground to hold exercises involving the public, the fire brigade and London Underground itself so that we can be certain that if another emergency occurs the public is fully aware of how best to behave?

It is a measure of both the previous extraordinary state of neglect and complacency about safety within the Underground system and the thoroughness of Mr. Fennell's report that so many recommendations for action should have been placed before the Secretary of State. There will be relief in many quarters that much is being done. However, there will also be horror and anger that repeated warnings, inquiries and recommendations of the kind which have now been accepted were so blatantly ignored for so many years.

The London Underground system is a vital and intrinsic part of the life of this capital city. It is crucial to our economic life and for the social and recreational lives of millions of our citizens. Despite the additional Government and ratepayers' money being applied to implement the recommendations, the Government are still intent upon imposing their reckless ideology on LRT.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) showed how passenger revenues have not made up for the loss of subsidy. The cost is there to be seen by all. Staff cuts are taking guards off trains and people off stations. Those changes will continue to have safety implications, especially given the alarming number of reported fires still occurring in the system. The public have the right to know, and the Secretary of State must ensure from now on that there is no limit on the freedom of information in matters of public safety.

The lessons of the Fennell inquiry are far-reaching for London Underground, but they have wider implications too. We have 38 km of rail tunnel currently being dug under the Channel and British Rail plans to tunnel 19 km under London to secure a new rail link to the coast. Tens of millions more people are to entrust their lives to such systems, and, if British Rail has its way, millions more will be delivered to King's Cross.

The public demand and have the right to expect that safety is the priority of those who provide our public transportation systems now and in the future, and that financial considerations do not stand in their way. I commend the Opposition's amendment to the House.

9.35 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): I begin by picking up a point made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) whose constituency interest was most closely touched by what happened on that night. He referred to reading the Fennell report and finding it a moving document. I concur with him fully in that. He talked about the heroism of the people whose acts that night are depicted in the report and he referred to the number of people who said that they were merely doing their job.

The only matter on which I would go one stage further than the hon. Gentleman is in mentioning also those members of the public who were not doing their job that night but who simply came to the aid of the victims—their fellow citizens. I think of one in particular whom I had the honour to meet, Mr. Palmer, who played a heroic role that night. I felt privileged and humbled to meet those people who conducted themselves so bravely that night.

There have been many interventions during the debate from hon. Members from the south-east, and London in particular, who felt on that evening the chill that was so well expressed by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) when she said that there but for the grace of God could have gone any of us.

We have heard many interventions, best put by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), welcoming Mr. Fennell's report as being so comprehensive. It is in no way sparing in its analysis of the events of that night. Nor is it sparing of criticism where Mr. Fennell believes that to be deserved.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), speaking for the Opposition, to some extent began to struggle with what the Fennell report did not say. In much of what he said, and in the Opposition's amendment to the Government's motion, he was concerned with what he says Mr. Fennell found to be ultra vires. My understanding of the report is that Mr. Fennell did not want his investigation to be side-tracked into a full-blown inquiry into London Underground finance.

That he ruled to be ultra vires. But he was interested in everything that he thought was relevant to the fire. He said:

"I went on to make it clear that I would allow proper questions directed to the underlying philosophy of the management towards safety and how decisions were made, together with the basis upon which they were made, insofar as they related to what happened in the disaster."

I take this to include the financial basis; and indeed that is implicit in the fact that Mr. Fennell considered evidence on finance from LRT and LUL, indeed reproduced much of it in the report, and felt able to conclude that there was no evidence that subsidy was too low, and that there had been a tendency for London Underground to underspend its budget. On that basis, Mr. Fennell heard evidence on financing which is presented in his report in chapter 19 on page 149. That evidence showed that from 1984-85 to 1987-88 the Underground had more subsidy available to it than it spent, and that over the same period investment expenditure increased by about half in real terms.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East was also at pains to talk about the culture within London Underground that militated, as he thought, against requests for further investment. I refer him to page 149 of the report, where Mr. Fennell says:

"I accept the evidence of the most senior management in London Regional Transport and London Underground that if funds were needed, funds were available."

The hon. Gentleman was also concerned about cuts in staff. Again, I refer to what Mr. Fennell said, as opposed to what he did not say, on page 152:

"I found no evidence that the reduction in the number of operating or maintenance staff contributed directly to the disaster at King's Cross . . . In my view the issue is not purely the number of staff in stations but rather the need to establish a proper level of safety at each station which can then be met by the provision of either automated aids or the proper disposition of staff."

That is an important point.

The hon. Gentleman and several others have referred to the important issue of fire certification. Mr. Fennell found that there was ambiguity about this and that it should be cleared up. The Government will clear it up by applying regulations under section 12 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 to Underground railway stations. It is quite clear from the clarification that we have made that an Underground railway station would be required to be certified unless section 12 regulations applied to it. The section 12 regulations will specify the facilities, precautions and practices that are necessary at Underground railway stations.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) asked me whether we envisage certification in the longer term. That is a possibility. Important research should be conducted to determine whether it is appropriate. It will hinge particularly on the control of smoke in Underground stations, which is a complex matter and different from the control of smoke in buildings above ground, for instance. Depending on the outcome of that research we may decide to continue section 12 regulations, or conclude that certification is required in the longer term. In either case, matters to do with the control of fire in Underground railway stations which may have been ambiguous until now will be put beyond any shadow of doubt.

A number of points were made about the criticisms which have been made of the railway inspectorate. I know that every hon. Member has read the Fennell report, in which the criticisms of the railway inspectorate are plain to see. It stands accused of too cosy a relationship with London Underground. There were too few inspectors. It is pointed out that they misunderstood the breadth of their responsibilities under the health and safety at work legislation, which was held by Mr. Fennell to extend to passenger safety. All those points have been accepted and my right hon. Friend has described the means by which the railway inspectorate is being brought up to strength.

Let us be clear that none of these things removes the central point that the responsibility for the safety of an operation must lie with the operator. No matter how active or commendable the railway inspectorate may be, that will always remain the case.

A number of hon. Members wanted to know how the Government will respond to the recommendation about the future of the railway inspectorate that Fennell put forward for consideration. I accept that there is a need for a fresh look at the arrangements for the railway inspectorate. The Government are undertaking a review to determine whether further changes are necessary in the interests of effectiveness across all the functions performed by the inspectorate, and we shall announce our conclusions in due course.

Mr. Prescott: I have read the latest review, established, I think, in 1987. The Minister makes it clear in recommendations to the House that he is not prepared to consider the separation of the inspectorate from the Department, although I believe that there is a conflict of interests. Is that ruled out in the review that the Minister has just mentioned?

Mr. Portillo: No. Nothing is ruled out. We approach the matter with an entirely open mind.

There has been considerable debate about the words that appeared in the London Regional Transport Act 1984, which required the management to be responsible and to

"have regard to . . . economy, efficiency and safety".

Those words have a long pedigree. The Transport Act 1947 imposed a duty on the British Transport Commission in similar terms, although the wording was not precisely the same, and the Transport Act 1962 and the London Transport Act 1969 contain the same words in the same order.

I do not believe that at any time the order of those three words was considered to imply that safety should come last. I think that the way in which the words were put together derived from the understanding that an efficiently organised railway would be run economically, efficiently and safely. It is difficult to imagine a railway being run safely without also being well managed. The dichotomy proposed by Opposition Members between efficiency and safety strikes me as false: it has been recognised by legislators and parliamentary draftsmen for many years that safety, economy and efficiency go hand in hand.

Mr. Spearing: Surely economy and safety do not necessarily go together. Costs could be cut in various ways, which I shall not explain to the Minister, and many measures that were more economical could well be less safe. Safety might be prejudiced by a combination of events hitherto unforeseen. That, surely, is the essence of today's debate.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman is a thoughful person; he must not try to parody my argument. I am

[Mr. Portillo]

saying that a management that does not have systems to enable it to control its finances is not a management that I would greatly trust to control its safety. Management systems are required for both functions, and legislation has put them together over the years.

Mr. Dobson: I think that we all accept that a management that was generally efficient would be likely to be efficient in discharging its safety functions, but is not one of the problems that, under pressure from Ministers, LRT experienced a conflict between efficiency and safety? That is why the draft of the business plan for LRT last year, after the King's Cross fire—which came into my possession—contained words to the effect that LRT would not be able to make as many efficient savings because it was having to spend money on safety.

Mr. Portillo: Hon. Members must read the Fennell report and reach their own conclusions, but I believe that many of the advances made in efficiency did not compromise safety. Increased revenue, achieved through the elimination of inefficiency practices, enabled the railway—at a time when it was running many more passenger miles than ever before—to make substantial advances which did not prejudice safety.

Hon. Members have often referred to the letter from my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State for Transport to Dr. Bright in 1984. It refers to the 1984 Act, which contains those three ingredients. My right hon. Friend was also at considerable pains to refer to

"a programme of investment to modernise the public transport systems",

to

"a steady programme to improve facilities for passengers, including interchanges"

and to better management—which, as I have said, is intimately related to safety.

Since the Fennell report has been published, London Underground has responded to it and has been reporting to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, on some occasions through me, on its progress in implementing the Fennell recommendations. The document produced by London Underground in response to the 157 recommendations is remarkable and on the whole has been extremely well received. It is a painstaking review of procedures, structures, organisation and training to which the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) referred.

London Underground has accepted the vast majority of the recommendations and is close to schedule on the major projects, although it admits to some slippage on some of its response to the 157 recommendations. The management of London Underground has a tremendous task before it in terms of the capital re-equipment of stations —for example, to strip down the escalators and remove the wooden parts. The public in London sees that happening. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) painted a graphic picture of the discomfort and disruption that that is causing to passengers. He is right to say that that in itself has safety implications. That is why there is a certain speed at which London Underground can proceed with that vital work. The public in London recognises that the work is being carried out to improve safety.

The £266 million that the Government have allocated for the implementation of the Fennell recommendations has been provided by the Government in accordance with a promise that my right hon. Friend gave that finance would be no barrier to implementation. It was made perfectly clear to the House during the debate on the London Regional Transport. (Levy) Order 1989 that the moneys that were necessary were being raised from the ratepayers of London and the taxpayers of the country. I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) that it is being provided from both sources. My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) was right to say that there was no inconsistency at all between providing the £266 million and the Fennell finding that subsidy had not been the problem underlying the King's Cross fire.

There was a tragic blind spot in London Underground in the matter of fire safety. That ignorance was universal, not simply within London Underground. As the Fennell report says, the disaster was foreseeable but the extent of it was unimaginable and the trench effect which we now know about was unknown. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) was right to say that it was remarkable that the management had that blind spot, given the dangers of fire underground. But he will appreciate that we all know with 20-20 hindsight very much more than was known at the time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) was right to say that the lessons of Fennell apply generally to employers throughout the country in various enterprises, and if they were put under the microscope in the way that London Underground has been scrutinised we should not be pleased at what we found.

I understand hon. Members' concern about the Underground ticketing system because its introduction coincides with our new awareness of the risk of fire in Underground stations. We must rely on expert advice and hon. Members are unwise to pick and choose between the expert advice that they like and that which does not fit in with their views. The London fire brigade and the railway inspectorate have repeatedly taken the view that the Underground ticketing system could be installed. Consultants are now considering the operation of that system. My right hon. Friend and I asked London Underground to take that fourth opinion on whether the Underground ticketing system was safe, and London Underground happily accepted our recommendation.

In his amendment to the early-day motion on the Order Paper my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) made a series of very good points referring to the fact that the Underground ticketing system replaces fenced areas and small exits in small numbers in railway stations. Certainly in larger stations the Underground ticketing system offers a considerably larger number of places through which people can pass in an emergency than the fabric which preceded the system.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm the statement that the Underground ticketing system was safe or the advice received from the fire brigade, London Regional Transport and the railway inspectorate was received before it was discovered that the system was not failsafe and in certain circumstances failed to danger point? That invalidates any confirmation that has been received from any of the authorities that the Minister has quoted.

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman may think that he is on to a good point, but he is not. The railway inspectorate

has been back to consider the matter since it was pointed out to me that there was a single phase power failure. The inspectorate noted that not all the gates remain shut but that the majority of them fly open if there is a single phase failure—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members wish only to knock the inspectorate. The members of the inspectorate are the expert advisers to the Secretary of State. I have no doubt about its expertise in this matter.

In some stations the Underground——

Mr. Dobson *rose*——

Mr. Portillo: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman twice already.

In some stations the Underground ticketing system will release ticket collectors who can give advice and assistance to passengers and look out for problems. After all, a ticket collector has little opportunity to look up from his job of taking tickets to see whether he can give assistance. I am amazed that the Opposition do not want staff to be released from ticket collecting to more interesting and worthwhile jobs where they can give more direct help to passengers. That is what they are enabled to do by the Underground ticketing system.

Mr. Fennell said:

"In my view, the issue is not purely the number of staff in stations but rather the need to establish a proper level of safety at each station which can then be met by the provision of either automated aids or the proper disposition of staff."

LRT staff numbers are now increasing. If the House doubts that, it is reported in the journal of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association for everybody to see. With the Underground ticketing system and aids such as close circuit television, their effectiveness is increasing. Many of the overseas metro systems which are held up for our admiration by hon. Members use Underground ticketing-system style gates. For example, they are in use in Hong Kong, Singapore, Washington and on the Paris RER.

Mr. Boateng: I asked the Minister specifically whether he would authorise and instruct LRT to publish traffic circulars that related to the issue of safety. Will he do that or will he continue to allow his Department to preside over a situation in which London Transport inspectors are riding up escalators once every two hours because of defective cleaning when, at the same time, cleaners are being laid off? It does not make sense.

Mr. Portillo: I was afraid that when the hon. Gentleman made his speech he was ignorant of LRT's response to the Fennell report. If he looks at the response to recommendation No. 38 he will see set out the position on escalator cleaning which covers the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Cohen: Did not the Minister admit in an answer to the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) that on any day 18 barrier gates do not open? If the barriers were in every station, 30 gates a day would not open. That is the position while the barriers are new. What will happen when they are old? A much higher number will not open. What confidence can we place on assurances that they will always open in an emergency?

Mr. Portillo: That has been investigated by the London fire brigade and the railway inspectorate. We will shortly have the consultants' report on that. I hope that the report will reassure the hon. Gentleman, but if it does not, action will have to be taken.

The fire on 18 November 1987 was a terrible event and 31 lives were lost. Many others were injured and many hon. Members have referred to the scars that remain for all those who were in any way affected by that event. It was a night of heroic actions and I again pay tribute to Mr. Fennell for the report which enables us to make improvements to safety in the future. He has made a series of recommendations—157 of them—and they have nearly all been accepted. Many of them are now well on the way to being implemented.

The response of London Regional Transport has been remarkable. It was accused of having an unco-ordinated, haphazard and untrained response and it is reacting to that by a series of most important management changes. I am impressed by the determination of the new management to see through the changes necessary. Every person must understand the importance of safety and his or her role within London Underground in fulfilling that. The staff at London Underground are better trained now and more certain of their responsibilities. The priority of safety has been reasserted. Management is giving a clearer lead——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 265.

Division No. 157] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Cousins, Jim
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Cox, Tom
Allen, Graham	Crowther, Stan
Alton, David	Cummings, John
Anderson, Donald	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Cunningham, Dr John
Armstrong, Hilary	Dalyell, Tam
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Darling, Alistair
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Dewar, Donald
Barron, Kevin	Dixon, Don
Battle, John	Dobson, Frank
Beckett, Margaret	Doran, Frank
Beith, A. J.	Douglas, Dick
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Duffy, A. E. P.
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Bermingham, Gerald	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Bidwell, Sydney	Eastham, Ken
Blair, Tony	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Boateng, Paul	Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Bradley, Keith	Fatchett, Derek
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Faulds, Andrew
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Fearn, Ronald
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Fisher, Mark
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Flannery, Martin
Buckley, George J.	Flynn, Paul
Caborn, Richard	Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Callaghan, Jim	Foster, Derek
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Foulkes, George
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Fraser, John
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Fyfe, Maria
Cartwright, John	Galbraith, Sam
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Clay, Bob	George, Bruce
Clelland, David	Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Godman, Dr Norman A.
Cohen, Harry	Golding, Mrs Llin
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Gordon, Mildred
Corbett, Robin	Gould, Bryan
Corbyn, Jeremy	Graham, Thomas

Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Holland, Stuart
Home Robertson, John
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Sean *(Knowsley S)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Robert Wareing.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Gryll, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heddle, John
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, P. *(New Forest)*
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Patnick, Irvine
Portillo, Michael
Rathbone, Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom

Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Dorrell and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the thorough and comprehensive report by Mr. Desmond Fennell QC on the investigation into the King's Cross Underground fire; endorses the Government's commitment to invest in the improvement and modernisation of the Underground and its decision to provide £266 m over the next three years for the implementation of the report's recommendations; notes London Regional Transport's constructive response to the report; and looks forward to continuing vigorous action by London Underground to implement its recommendations.

National Health Service (Charges)

10.14 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 396), dated 8th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient also to discuss the 11 other National Health Service prayers:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 392), dated 9th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Dental Charges) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 394), dated 8th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Dental Charges) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 363), dated 7th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 419), dated 9th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Scotland) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 326), dated 3rd March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (General Ophthalmic Services) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 395), dated 8th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (General Ophthalmic Service) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 387), dated 8th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 517) dated 20th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 393), dated 9th March 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 10th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 614), dated 6th April 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th April, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 616), dated 6th April 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 7th April, be annulled.

Mr. Cook: Twelve prayers relating to the Health Service are before the House tonight and all relate to charges for drugs and appliances. I trust that the House will forgive me if I do not divide my time equally between the 12 prayers. Several matters of substance are raised in the regulations, but I must confess that Opposition Members do not hold strong views about the price of wigs prescribed on the National Health Service. Although I know that the price of wigs is on the way up, I am greatly relieved to note——

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Is there a special concession for wigs for members of the legal profession?

Mr. Cook: I think that on this occasion I can give my hon. Friend an assurance on behalf of the Government that wigs for the legal profession are not under discussion.

I am relieved to note that, whatever the rate of inflation for human hair wigs, it is at least not as high as the rate of inflation which appears to be affecting the budget for advertising——

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford) *rose*——

Mr. Cook: How could I resist giving way to the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Wells: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the question relating to wigs should be taken separately?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point which, of course, has been a matter of discussion between the Front Benches. I must advise the hon. Gentleman that our difficulty is that prayers, unfortunately, do not get the same protection in terms of time before the House that orders get. If the hon. Gentleman would like to join us in pressing for the same amount of time for debate on prayers as the House provides for debate on orders, I should be happy to ensure that there were separate rounds of debate. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have adequate time to deploy his point and if he chooses to seek to divide the House on the basis that the charge for wigs is an unreasonable imposition, I shall give favourable consideration to advising my colleagues to join him in the Division Lobby.

I am relieved that the rate of inflation in the charges in the regulations on wigs, other appliances and drugs is at least not as high as the rate of inflation that the Department of Health has just applied to its own advertising budget, because it has been discovered that the rate of inflation for that for the current year is no less than 87 per cent. Opposition Members urge the Department of Health to apply that uprating to its expenditure on patient care rather than on its expenditure on advertising it.

I do not propose to delay the House further on such matters because the matter of substance to which I wish to draw the attention of the House and to which I shall be directing the remainder of my remarks is the instrument providing for the exemption from the charges for eye tests. That is something of real substance which touches on a matter of great public policy. It has been an issue of considerable controversy in the House, both between the different parties in the House and among Conservative Members.

The particular issue for debate tonight is why the regulations providing for exemption from charges do not provide for exemption from the charges for pensioners. After all, pensioners make up the majority of those coming forward for eye tests. Indeed, pensioners represent 60 per cent. of the people who go to opticians for eye tests. Pensioners are not automatically exempt under the provisions. Tonight I wish to challenge whether, in the light of the evidence that is now available to us about the charges for eye tests, it is right to continue to exclude pensioners from exemption from the charges.

I recall that we last debated this matter on 1 November, when the Secretary of State for Health, whom I am delighted to see has been able to free himself from other engagements to join us on this occasion, made the central point that the charges for eye tests would be so low that it was not necessary to worry about those groups that were not exempt. If I may say so, he was characteristically robust in stating his view. In the course of the debate he asserted that it was his strong opinion that competition would drive down charges for the eye test.

I shall share with the House a couple of quotations from the Secretary of State's speech. He said:

"I do not believe that all opticians will maintain a charge for a sight test which is equivalent to the present NHS fee".

Later he said:

"even in rural areas, I cannot believe that opticians will be too far away from other opticians for such pressures not to exist. Although they may have a slightly protected market, they will not sustain their position if it is clear to their rural customers that in nearby towns such as Leeds or Hull there are no charges for a test."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1988; Vol. 139, cc. 928, 930.]

That was a clear statement of faith that a number of opticians would charge less than the NHS fee, including, for a curious reason not immediately clear to me, particularly opticians in Leeds and Hull. The NHS fee was then £9·75.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's second statement of faith was that not only would some opticians charge less than the NHS fee, but a number—at times in this passage of his speech he appeared to think that it would be the norm—would make no charge at all. It was on that basis that he invited the House to approve the charge for eye tests. On that basis the House approved the charge, without agreeing to an exemption for pensioners and in the full knowledge that the regulations before us now would be laid without providing such an exemption.

Last week, my office carried out a survey of opticians in a couple of dozen towns throughout Britain, from Aberdeen to Falmouth, covering twice as many opticians. Nowhere among the 50 opticians whom we sampled did we find a single optometrist offering an eye test free. Nowhere among the ones that we sampled did we find anyone offering a test for less than £10·40. Boots, which caters for 26 per cent. of the market, is charging an eye test fee of £10·50. Dollond and Aitchison, the next market leader, charges £10·40. Between them, those two firms have 40 per cent. of the market, so those are not untypical figures which we specially searched out. They represent the market leaders.

Among the independents, we identified opticians who were charging between £10·50 and £12·50 as a norm. Quite a number of the optometrists that we sampled were charging £15. We even found one optometrist who was charging £17·50. Ironically, I am bound to say that was the optometrist nearest the Department of Health, from whom the Department could most readily have sought advice.

We included Leeds and Hull in our sample. There we found that the eye test was not free, nor indeed was the charge £9·75 or less. The optometrists that we sampled at random in Leeds and Hull were charging between £10·40 and £12·50.

As the Secretary of State knows, I wrote to him giving the results of the survey. *[Interruption.]* If the Secretary of State wishes to intervene, I shall give way. I am unable to follow his sedentary interruption. The Secretary of State replied to me on 10 April. I was rather distressed that his letter commenced, "Dear Mr. Cook". That is a sad comedown from the days of the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who always started her letters to me, "My Dear Robin".

In his letter, the Secretary of State admitted that he would not disagree that some opticians had set their charges at £10 and £12. It would have been very difficult for him to disagree. I am sure he will agree that I am a fair-minded man who would not seek to deny him credit where it is due. I will give him the credit that he managed to find one optician, whom he named, who is providing a free sight test—a Mr. N. J. Bailey, an optician in Dover. In the length and breadth of Britain, we have one optician in Dover providing free sight tests. I regret to say that I have not been able to discover the cost of a second-class return rail fare from London to Dover, but I doubt whether the competition of one optician in Dover providing free sight tests will significantly depress the market in central London.

Of course, before my survey we knew that the Secretary of State was well aware of what was happening in the market. We knew, too, that he was aware of the fact that optometrists, contrary to his assurances to the House, were not only charging the equivalent of the full NHS fee, but were actually charging more. We knew that because, on 13 March, the right hon. and learned Gentleman issued a consultative document to the optometrists' profession proposing a cheapie—a quick eye test that would simply test whether the person coming into the optometrist's premises could read without glasses.

My hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) will be developing the medical points at issue in the proposed two-tier eye test. All I wish to do at this stage is to draw the House's attention to the fact that this circular document, and the proposal contained within it, is in flat contradiction to the assurance that the right hon. and learned Gentleman gave the House when we debated this matter on 1 November. I am sorry to see that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is shaking his head, because I shall read his own words as they are recorded. He said:

> "I believe that the bulk of responsible optometrists and opticians give a full sight test . . . and we have the powers to specify the extent to which the patients and customers are tested. We shall look at the necessity to use them if necessary if we find that people are given quick sight tests and not screening for glaucoma . . . What I said is important and is relevant to the detection and treatment of glaucoma."—[*Official Report*, 1 November 1988; Vol. 139, c. 932.]

Far from using the powers to which he referred in that exchange, the Secretary of State has circulated the profession before coming to Parliament and asking for powers to make it legal not to screen for glaucoma and to introduce a cheap formal eye test that will meet the form of an eye test without meeting any of the substance of the examination of the eye. I serve notice on the Government that, when that order is brought before the House—if they are so ill advised as to persist against the unanimous advice of the profession not to do so—it will be our intention to divide the House and to invite Government Back Benchers, who were taken in by the Secretary of State's assurance on 1 November, to join us in voting it down.

In the meantime, we are left with tonight's regulations, on which I would wish to make three observations arising from the evidence that I have paraded in the course of my speech. My first observation is that it is now clear—certainly allowing for the fact that Boots and Dollond and Aitchison corner 40 per cent. of the market—that the great majority of optometrists' clients are being charged a fee for the eye test that is not only equivalent to the previous NHS fee, but in many cases represents a generous mark-up on that fee.

The conclusion must be that competition within the Health Service, far from forcing prices down—as the right hon. Gentleman promised us only six months ago—has the effect of driving prices up. That is not especially surprising, because what has happened with the passage of the Health and Medicines Act 1988 is that the NHS has given up its advantageous position as the monopoly purchaser of eye tests. Having given up that role, it need not surprise right hon. and hon. Members, with their understanding of market mechanisms, to discover that the effect of the NHS withdrawing as monopoly purchaser has been to allow the market to drive up prices rather than to lower them.

Secondly, we must form some conclusions from the events of the past six months and the assurances given to the House on 1 November about the conduct of the Secretary of State for Health. The Secretary of State has plainly been proved wrong in his promises about what would happen to the charges for eye tests. He has not been merely proved wrong; he has been proved wrong in glorious technicolor panorama. In itself, that is not unique in politics. What is interesting about the Secretary of State's predicament and mistake is that he got it wrong precisely because he refused to listen to the profession that advised him not to persist with abolishing the free eye test. The profession warned him that the charge for eye tests would be between £10 and £15. I remember seeing that advice when we debated this matter last autumn. In his speech on 1 November, the Secretary of State said that he did not believe the optometrists who were offering that advice.

There is a clear parallel between the Secretary of State's refusal to listen to the advice of the informed profession in that case and his current conduct in relation to the White Paper on National Health Service reforms. In the consultative period—there is always a consultative period—on the White Paper, the Secretary of State has again been fond of asserting his strong opinions. He has refused to listen to the detailed, cogent criticisms of the profession which understands better and knows at first hand the needs of the Health Service; therefore, he has every prospect of being equally wrong in the conclusions that he draws from the White Paper debate.

The second and rather more worrying conclusion from the events of the last six months, in particular the production of the consultative document of 30 March, is that the Secretary of State does not keep his word. In November, he assured the House that he would not stand for a reduced-price, quick eye test. In March he proposed to make such a test legal. That is no comfort to those in the

[Mr. Cook]

Health Service and to those who depend on it who are being invited to trust his assurances on the White Paper. To get it wrong was forgiveable but to break a pledge to Parliament is not.

I now come to my last observation on recent evidence. It relates to pensioners who are not exempted by the regulations. In the original debate the House voted by a narrow margin to approve the charges for eye tests. It did than on the assurance that the charges were likely to be less than £9·75 and might well turn out to be free. They have turned out to be anything but free. The charges range from £10·40 to £17·50. I need hardly explain that pensioners cannot readily afford such charges.

Many pensioners will now fail to turn up for regular eye checks. Some of those who fail to do so will put their sight at risk. I regret to tell the House that we cannot amend the regulations. We can only reject or pass them. I cannot advise the House to reject them because they provide for limited exemptions. Regrettably the exemptions do not apply to all pensioners. I invite the Under-Secretary of State to reflect on the evidence that is now available to the House and which was not available in November about the reality of eye test charges. In view of that serious evidence and the assurances of the Secretary of State, I invite the Under-Secretary to come back with further regulations to provide the same exemption to all pensioners. If he does that, he will not only safeguard pensioners but rescue the reputation of the Secretary of State.

10.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), in opening the debate covering all 12 instruments, dealt selectively with one of them, that concerning the exemptions for sight tests, and I note that he does not intend to advise his hon. Friends to divide the House, presumably on all 12. He made three points, and I shall deal with those before dealing with each of the 12 instruments.

His first point concerned pensioners and the eye test. I remind the House that about 2 million pensioners who are in receipt of income support will have full access to free National Health Service sight tests. Further, as anyone who has taken the trouble to study the measures will see, those with an income of just above the levels of income support will also qualify for assistance for the eye test on a scale which declines according to the income of the individual and the family. So a substantial number of pensioners will qualify for the free eye test.

We believe that a charge of £10 every, say, three years is a reasonable and fair cost for a pensioner to bear, bearing in mind that the income of pensioners as a whole has risen substantially in the last decade and that pensioners, like other members of society, with increased income and increased disposable resources, will be able to make sensible decisions about what to do about taking care of their health.

Next, the hon. Member for Livingston talked about the levels at which private sight test fees were settling. His quotations from the letter from the Secretary of State for Health were selective. He glossed over the fact that it is clearly far too early, as my right hon. and learned Friend pointed out in his reply, to draw any conclusions.

The hon. Member for Livingston and anyone with experience of the interplay of market forces in this, as in any other sphere, knows that it takes time for the participants in that market to make sensible decisions about where to pitch their fees. It is too early to make a judgment, and for the hon. Gentleman to quote the range of from £10 to £17 is not a fair representation of the present position.

Of the largest suppliers, Boots is charging £10·50 and Dollond and Aitchison £10·40. The hon. Gentleman knows that the reimbursement figure for the NHS sight test is £10·40. It is far too early to make a judgment about where other competitors in the market will pitch their fees. They will wish to see what degree of business Boots and Dollonds attract at that level.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend said in answer to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that he believes that a pensioner will need to have his or her eyes tested once every three years. Why did he select that time scale? I thought that elderly people might need an eye test at least once a year. On that basis, £10 every year for a pensioner is a heavy financial burden.

Mr. Freeman: I would not wish to prescribe what is the correct frequency, and I am sure that my hon. Friend would not do so either. I was suggesting the sort of frequency for those who do not have disease. Under the regulations, those with diabetes and glaucoma, and those related in families to people who are so suffering, will continue to have free tests.

While I was not suggesting the frequency of testing, on average—and we know that there is no such thing as an average pensioner—the Government believe that going for a test, assuming that one is free of disease and free of a history of disease, every three years and paying about £10 is a reasonable expense set in the context of growing disposable income on the part of the retired.

The hon. Member for Livingston then referred to private sight tests and the consultation document which has been circulated by the Department of Health. It is a consultative document and we are still consulting on the possibility of regulating those who choose to have a private sight test and who might not choose to have an examination as part of that test, doing so perfectly understanding that they are not having a full examination of the eye.

These regulations are about increasing the resources for the National Health Service through reasonable charges and sensible policies about the provision of optical services whilst ensuring that people who cannot afford to pay for various NHS services are protected.

It might be for the convenience of the House if I consider the regulations in the order in which they appear on today's Order Paper. There are 12 instruments in all, six for England and six parallel instruments for Scotland. I will begin with the National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) Regulations 1989 and their Scottish equivalents.

These regulations provide a new scheme for vouchers to be issued in appropriate cases for help with the cost of a private sight test, increase the value by 5 per cent. overall of existing vouchers for glasses and extend on a statutory

basis the voucher scheme for the repair and replacement of spectacles under certain circumstances. In particular, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the provisions which allow help for those on low income towards the cost of a private sight test. That meets a commitment we agreed during the debate on the Health and Medicines Bill.

Briefly, the regulations will ensure that those who are assessed as being able to contribute from their income an amount less than the current NHS sight test fee of £10·40 will be eligible for a voucher towards the cost of their private test. The actual value of the voucher will vary in each case according to the private sight test fee and the amount of the individual's assessed contribution.

The regulations also introduce arrangements which will allow help under the voucher scheme to extend to the repair and replacement of spectacles in certain circumstances. Children will continue to receive help no matter what the circumstances of the damage or loss to their spectacles. Under these regulations, however, for the first time adults will receive help where the loss or damage has occurred as a direct result of illness. We have deliberately taken a wide definition of illness so that family practitioner committees will have discretion to decide whether or not to allow the claim, after making such inquiries as they think fit. I am sure these arrangements will be welcomed by both sides of the House.

We are, therefore, through this set of regulations giving help with the cost of the private sight test, increasing voucher values and introducing a new repair and replacement scheme for spectacles for those adults suffering from illness who get help under the voucher scheme.

The National Health Service (Dental Charges) Regulations 1989 and their Scottish equivalents fulfil the commitment we made during the passage of the Health and Medicines Bill to extend the system of fully proportional charges for dental treatment to include dentures and bridges, which were previously on a fixed scale of charges. This means that all charges for dental treatment in the general dental services, and the charges for dentures and bridges in the hospital service—the only charges levied in the hospital dental service—are now on a uniform charging basis as a fixed proportion of cost. That proportion remains at the level fixed last April for dental treatment, namely 75 per cent. There is no change in the maximum charge for a course of treatment, which remains at £150.

There is no increase in charges for routine dental treatment as a result of these regulations. They remain at 75 per cent. of the fees payable to dentists, and will therefore increase only when those fees are increased and in the same measure. As a result of bringing dentures and bridges within the same proportional system as other treatment, there is an increase in denture charges of an average of about 10 per cent. to bring them up to 75 per cent. of costs. They were previously charged at a flat rate which was fixed originally at 75 per cent. of the fees. However, they did not go up when fees were reviewed last October, and they are now being brought back into line with other treatment. Charges for most bridges are not being increased because there was very little change in their costs when fees were reviewed last October.

The dental profession has long advocated proportional charging and warmly welcomed our decision to introduce it for routine treatment last year. It also welcomes these regulations inasmuch as they complete the simplification process by bringing dentures and bridges within the proportional system. Consumer interests have also welcomed these measures as fairer and simpler all round.

I should add in all fairness that the profession and other groups have argued that the 75 per cent. rate is too high. That is not an argument that the Government would accept. It is much less than the 100 per cent. that applied to millions of small courses of treatment before April 1988. An estimated 6 million courses of treatment were cheaper in cash terms in 1988-89 than the year before. There is certainly no evidence that the current level of charges is proving a deterrent. The number of courses of treatment in 1988-89, the first full year of proportional charging for most treatment, up to February, which is the latest month for which we have figures, is up by no less than 5·6 per cent. on the corresponding period in 1987-88. We are heading for the largest year on year increase since 1973. That continues an upward trend which has seen the number of courses of dental treatment rise by 19 per cent. in England and Wales since 1979, from 28·5 million in 1979 to nearly 33·8 million in 1987-88.

The cost for a dental examination is £3·15 and that charge should bring in about £50 million in 1989-90 for the benefit of the NHS as a whole. The 75 per cent. rate, with the exemptions which apply to about 40 per cent. of the population, means that the taxpayer is paying about two thirds of the cost of all general dental treatment. The patient pays in aggregate about one third.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): There has not yet been any consumer resistance to the charges, but is my hon. Friend aware that many patients are expressing to their dentists considerable surprise that the examination fee is as little as £3·15?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House that the charge for a dental examination will be £3·15.

The National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 1989 and their Scottish equivalent introduce a modest increase in prescription charges. They also consolidate the existing regulations with some minor amendments. The prescription charge rose by 20p on 1 April from £2·60 to £2·80—an increase of 7·7 per cent. which will represent about 43 per cent. of the average prescription cost. We believe that it is right for those people who can afford to do so to make a contribution towards the cost of their medication by paying a charge. Equally, we think it is right and proper to increase that charge in line with the increasing costs of the NHS. The increase will provide an extra £10 million in income during this year. Therefore, the extra money raised by the charges represents a real and valuable addition to the total resources available to the NHS.

More than three quarters of prescriptions are dispensed free of charge because of the wide-ranging exemption arrangements. In addition to those on a low income, no prescription charges are paid by pensioners, children under 16, students under 19, expectant and nursing mothers and people who suffer from a number of specified medical conditions. Only people who can afford to pay the charges have to do so. What is more, there are arrangements to protect those even in that group who need a large amount of medication.

[Mr. Freeman]

There are available pre-payment certificates, or "season tickets", which, in effect, set a maximum to the amount that any individual has to pay. Nearly 5 per cent. of prescriptions now go to holders of season tickets. The regulations also increase the charges, roughly proportionately, for the annual and four-monthly season tickets. Season tickets continue to represent excellent value. They will save money for anyone who needs more than 14 items in a year or more than five prescriptions during a four-month period.

There is no evidence that increases in charges deter people from getting the medicines they need. Last April we put the prescription charge up by 20p, just as we are doing this year. Last year 346¼ million items were dispensed in England—an increase of 11 million over the 1987 figure which was nearly 13 million over the 1986 figure. Indeed, apart from the year when we introduced the elected list, the number of prescriptions dispensed has risen regularly since 1981.

The National Health Service (General Ophthalmic Services) Amendment Regulations 1989 and their Scottish equivalent restrict National Health Service free sight tests to certain restricted categories, comprising about 40 per cent. of the population. We concluded last year that it was right that those who could afford to should pay for the cost of a private sight test. The moneys saved, an estimated £85 million a year in Great Britain, are to be used in various initiatives—primary care services such as facilities in general practice, health education and improving the availability and quality of general dental services. Hon. Members will recall that we promised during the passage of the Health and Medicines Act 1988, under which these regulations are made, that those who could not reasonably be expected to pay for a private sight test and those who for medical reasons needed to have sight tests more frequently would continue to benefit from free National Health Service tests. For this reason, the regulations provide that the following groups remain under the umbrella of the National Health Service: children under 16, full-time students under 19, people and their partners receiving income support or family credit, those on a low income who have been assessed as being entitled to full help with National Health Service costs, the registered blind and partially sighted, people needing certain complex lenses, diagnosed diabetics and glaucoma patients and close relatives of glaucoma patients aged 40 and over.

Additionally, people who are required as part of their treatment under the hospital eye service to have regular sight tests, for example, those awaiting an operation for a cataract, will continue to be eligible for free National Health Service sight tests when these are undertaken by a high street optician. These arrangements will, I estimate, cover about 40 per cent. of all sight tests. I have already mentioned that other people whose income is just above the level at which they would qualify for full help with National Health Service costs will be able to get a voucher towards the cost of their private test.

I would now like to touch on the effects of our proposals on those who will have private sight tests. As I said, it is too early to draw conclusions from the fees that opticians are talking about at the moment. But already we can see variety coming into the market, and it will clearly pay the customer to shop around. As I said earlier, the big multiple chains seem to have settled for the moment on a fee of around £10, in line with the National Health Service fee of £10·40 reimbursed to the optician for those who qualify for a free test. But I have to say that, even at a fee of £10, it seems to me unreasonable to argue that a customer is likely to be deterred from having a test about once every three years.

We stand by these regulations. We believe that they are right and that they will ensure that help is given where it is needed most.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister has now twice relied on saying that the charge made by Dollond and Aitchison is equivalent to the new NHS fee, which came into effect on the same date as charges were abolished, and which is now £10·40. I remind him that the Secretary of State said on 1 November:

"I do not believe that all opticians will maintain a charge for a sight test which is equivalent to the present NHS fee". —[*Official Report*, 1 November 1988; Vol. 139, c. 928.]

If the Department's view is now that it is acceptable that opticians charge a fee for sight tests which is equivalent to the NHS fee, will the hon. Gentleman at least admit that the Secretary of State's advice was wrong, and that the House was invited to approve the charges for the eye test on the basis of mistaken assurances from the Secretary of State?

Mr. Freeman: I entirely reject that charge. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the free market takes time to have an effect. He cannot expect market forces in the first week of a new regime to alter charges out of all proportion to those being charged by two of the major suppliers

The hon. Gentleman quoted selectively from my right hon. and learned Friend's reply. He gave the example of a company—Specialeyes—which has 59 outlets throughout the country and which will charge most people £9·25, while offering pensioners sight tests for £2·50. The hon. Gentleman deliberately ignored that large chain in his selective quotation. Replying to the hon. Gentleman, my right hon. and learned Friend concluded:

"I have no doubt that as time goes on we shall see prices reduced to levels lower than the National Heath Service sight test fee."

With patience, and with the full effect of a new and competitive market, we shall see the benefits of competition being reflected in lower prices, to the benefit of all who choose sight tests.

I commend the regulations to the House and invite my hon. Friends to reject the prayers.

10.54 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I am extremely pleased that the House has been given another opportunity to debate this tiresome subject—the controversial issue of charges for dental and eye examinations—and to discuss the recent increase in prescription charges. In such circumstances it is difficult not to repeat what I, along with many other hon. Members, have said on numerous occasions here and elsewhere, but as the Government have a tendency to bury their head in the sand it is often necessary to keep digging until the argument hits home.

Charges for eye tests and dental checks contradict an important factor in health care—prevention. The health of the nation will be the poorer for such a move; more

disgracefully, the nation's poor will suffer most. Charges deter people from seeking help and treatment, despite what the Minister has said. I find it remarkable that the Government can brush off the introduction of such charges with comments implying that, because the charge will be only £3·15 every six months or so, it will not act as a deterrent. Even if we ignore the fact that many people detest going to the dentist in any case and that any excuse not to do so will be jumped on, such comments highlight the extent to which the Government are out of touch with what is happening in a large part of our society.

Mr. John Greenway: The Gentleman cannot have been listening to what my hon. Friend the Minister said in his speech, that in 1988-89 the number of courses of dental treatment rose by 5·6 per cent. How does he square that statistic with what he has just said about dental attendance?

Mr. Fearn: Certainly the information given in publicity has induced people to go for tests in the last year, but now that the charges are coming in I am sure that those figures will drop.

When a family's income in take-home pay can be as little as £70 a week, £3·15 is a lot of money—particularly when we add the prescription charge of £2·80 per item and the £10 to £18 which may be charged for an eye test. I know that some categories are exempt from charges, including those in receipt of family credit or income support; but I also know that the take-up rate for those benefits is very poor, despite the recent adaptation of the statistics by the Department of Social Security. A number of factors could account for that. Some people are too proud or too independent; others cannot cope with the interminable form-filling and questions, the long wait—the whole degrading exercise. Yet others have not the wherewithal to make it through the bureaucratic jungle. There is no doubt that they will suffer as a result of the charges.

Then there are the low-income groups who are not entitled to support, but who nevertheless struggle every week to make ends meet. Children, because they are exempt, may not be harmed by the regulations, but parents may well put off visits to the optician, dentist and doctor because their children need a pair of shoes or other article of clothing. Our senior citizens, who have contributed to the health and welfare of the country all their lives, should be entitled to seek the health care that they need regardless of their ability to pay, to ensure a decent quality of life without the hindrance and encumbrance of state administration.

Even those who are allowed to claim may find that they cannot obtain vouchers because—as we have been reading lately—backlogs cause them to be "out of time". Regulations should allow discretion for late claims. The elderly may suffer the most, although they are the people who should be using the services the most. Regular inspection by a dentist can identify pathological changes in tissue and bone structure, and an eye examination can pick up many diseases. Regulation 13B in statutory instrument 1989 No. 395 and regulation 14B in No. 387 (S.41), although welcome in the circumstances, rather miss the point. Many people will be deterred from visiting an optician for an eye test and therefore the diseases which would place them in the exempt category will not be detected.

I mentioned earlier that the Government justified the introduction of dental charges by claiming that the charge was small at £3·15. I recall others claiming that market forces would reduce or even eliminate charges for eye tests. The recent survey, reported in most newspapers, certainly has shown how wrong the Government are to rely on market forces. The letter which the Minister issued as a press release dated 10 April, obviously because he was proud of its contents, shows how unfair, unpredictable and unreliable the market is and that it certainly should not be one of the determinants as to the availability of health care for any particular individual. Not everyone can shop around. The elderly, the disabled, young parents, those who cannot afford fares or those who do not have adequate public transport facilities cannot always do so. Others in rural areas do not have the outlets from which to choose. Unfortunately, not everyone lives in Dover or Witney in Oxon where we are told that charges are below £10. It is quite inappropriate that a crucial factor in the good health of individuals should be left to the whims of the market and could mean that one pensioner pays £2·50 while another pensioner in a neighbouring area may pay as much as £17·50 for an eye test. Does the Minister really believe that the latter will not be deterred from seeking help?

It is never very clear exactly what we are talking about in terms of charges for eye tests. Are we talking about a full eye examination or an eyesight test only? Will consumers be aware of exactly what they are paying for? As I understand it, and I hope that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, patients who are exempt from charges can be sure of getting a full eye examination while those who have to pay do not have such a guarantee. What type of test will a pensioner who has to pay only £2·50, as per the Minister's press release, receive? Of course the full eye examination is most beneficial as diseases and other problems can be detected during that exercise.

Another group of people who will be adversely affected and do not appear to be exempt are those who receive a disability allowance but are not on income support. Perhaps the Minister will clarify the position of such people. By definition it is more difficult and often more expensive for them to go about their daily business. They are often pushed to make ends meet, but because their allowance is 20p or 40p more than social security regulations state, they are not entitled to income support or other benefit. When they need to have their eyes tested or their teeth checked, will they have to undergo the bureaucratic nightmare of a means test to find out whether they are entitled to full payment, part payment, third payment, quarter payment or any of the other possible combinations?

Statutory instruments Nos. 517, 393, 614 and 616 seek to increase the amount of deductions to be calculated before entitlement, in line with social security upratings. That is yet another example of the Government not living in the real world. They automatically assume that life is hunky-dory, full of happy families who are all aware of and are fulfilling their responsibilities to each other. But life is not like that. Many families have non-dependent relatives living with them who cannot or will not contribute £12·50. In the case of young dependants or others in low-paid work, they often cannot afford to contribute. The parents are keeping their children's heads

[Mr. Fearn]

above water. In other cases family and communications break-downs may have been brought about by poor living conditions and lack of finances.

Why is it that whenever the Government introduce legislation or make regulations, whether to introduce charges or give taxes away, it is always those who are already struggling who are hit the hardest? I believe that it was Sir Keith Joseph who first referred to the "cycle of deprivation" and said that it must be broken. Every move that the Government make adds to that cycle and it becomes a vicious circle.

The good health of individuals is paramount to the wellbeing of the nation. Ill health is a serious restriction on the freedom of any individual. The promotion of good health through prevention, diagnosis and treatment can benefit all collectively and individually. Charges deter people from using the Health Service and contribute to a system in which there is provision for the rich and provision for the poor.

We are told that the total charge for NHS services amounts to £640 million. We know that the present charges are designed to save between £50 million and £70 million. Those are large amounts but represent only 3 per cent. or 4 per cent. of the total cost of the Health Service. I am certain that if the Government so desired they could easily transfer such charges to levies on some industries such as, for example, tobacco, alcohol and many others which could have the added benefit of contributing to good health promotion.

Elimination of the present charges would reduce the administrative burden and make life a great deal easier and healthier for us all.

11.6 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that we have just completed a long and involved debate on the King's Cross fire and the Fennell report. The Secretary of State for Transport told us that the delay in holding the debate was because he wanted to give the House the fullest amount of information concerning that terrible tragedy.

During the debate the Secretary of State was pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on the relationship between the Home Office and the Department of Transport and on matters concerning the emergency and fire services.

During the debate a story appeared on the tapes saying that the Department of Transport has now ordered an investigation into some allegations made in a letter in *The Times* this morning. I read that letter, which was from Sir Keith Bright who was in charge of the services. I considered it to be partly due to sour grapes.

To find out from the tapes tonight that the Department has ordered an investigation is a matter of subtance and concern. If it is true and the Secretary of State withheld the information from the House during the debate, it would amount almost to contempt of the House. I ask you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through the offices of the House, if you will ask the Secretary of State to make a statement and, if it is not possible tonight, he should make a statement tomorrow because he has a sad history of withholding informaton from the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am not sure to what extent that is a matter for the Chair. Doubtless what has been said will have been heard on the Treasury Bench and conveyed to the Secretary of State. In any case, I shall ensure that Mr. Speaker is aware of what has been said.

11.8 pm

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): My contribution to the debate can, I am happy to say, be brief. However, unhappily, I have to repeat that I have not changed the view that I held and expressed in the House last April and when we debated the Health and Medicines Bill. I listened to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary with great care, but I am still unable to acknowledge that there is not a fundamental principle at stake. I do not intend to enter into arguments about deterrence, what people can afford or what market forces will produce in terms of the eventual level of charges. My argument has always been and is confined to the fact that I was proud that in our National Health Service we had the fundamental right to free inspections of teeth and eyes. I have not opposed, and do not oppose tonight, the increases in prescription charges. I acknowledge that within these regulations there are wide exemptions and that many people will not find themselves in great difficulties. But the issue of people being entitled to have their teeth inspected without a charge is fundamental to the concept of preventive medicine.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) was interrupted by my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who made the point that some people are surprised that they are being charged only £3. I am not surprised that some people are surprised. But for many people in my constituency, where we still have an unemployment rate of 10 per cent.—well above the national average and dramatically above the East Anglian regional average, which is much lower than the national average—£3 for teeth inspections and £10 for eye tests has an effect. The fact that innumerable of my hon. Friends who represent wealthy areas in south-east England find that their constituents are surprised that the charge is a mere £3 does not have much impact on the elderly folk who come to retire in Norfolk, as well as those who were born and bred there and who live in an area of low average incomes, apart from the high unemployment which I have already mentioned.

The Government have had a most successful economic policy and are talking about repaying billions of pounds of the national debt—for very good reasons. They are now talking about £50 million or so to do away with what has been a fundamental right within the National Health Service. Notwithstanding all the logical arguments advanced by my hon. Friend the Minister tonight and by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State in previous debates, it is still what I called last year a piddling measure. I repeat that tonight and I go further. It is an idiotic measure. I am not surprised that few people in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale are worried about £3. They are probably so overwhelmed by the general unpopularity of what the Government are doing generally to reform the Health Service that they view the imposition of a fee for teeth and eye inspections as a minor feature of a rather bad story all round.

Before some of my hon. Friends think that I am opposed to the Health Service reforms, I must say that I believe that there is an enormous amount of good in the White Paper. However, the regulations require us as Conservative Members to vote for measures that are unnecessary, ineffective, and merely upset people so that they will not then see the value of the enormous and successful work that the Government are doing.

I must record that I cannot support the charges. If an opportunity were to arise in the ballot for private Members' Bills, the issue that I would want to put at the top of my list of priorities would be to restore the free tests. I hope that even at this late hour my Front Bench colleagues will take back the regulations. It does them no credit to be here at this time of night asking us to support them again.

11.13 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): The press statement issued by the Department said that the regulations were not imposing a charge, but removing a subsidy. That curious use of words typifies the attitude of dissimulation and deceit which surrounds this affair. The Minister has said that it is too early to make judgments about the prices being charged for eye examinations by opticians, but his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was willing to make forecasts and judgments about that even before the Health and Medicines Bill became an Act.

We were told that market forces take time to operate. But we were not told why on earth market forces should lead people to work for nothing. That does not happen in any other field, so why should it happen in this one?

Why should eye examinations, which may or may not lead to the prescription of spectacles, and which involve a most highly skilled person who has had long and most exacting training, be free? I can conclude only that it exposes ministerial ignorance of anything to do with eyes, eye examinations or optical practice. There is no way that opticians can recoup the cost of eye examinations if they offer them as freebies. If that cost is thrown in with the rest of the transaction, opticians will come a cropper, because there may be no "rest" of the transaction. Between one fifth and one quarter of eye examinations do not result in a prescription for glasses. Therefore, an optician cannot even add the cost to that of the spectacles, yet I have no doubt that that is the basis on which the ministerial forecasts were made. It is impossible for people to offer services or goods for nothing, whether we have a market economy or whatever. It will not happen with optics.

The Minister's statement about three-year frequency was rightly challenged by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). He went on to repeat the claim that every three years is the appropriate frequency. How then can people have the National Health Service eye examination to which they are entitled without question once a year? Why is the normal advice to people without problems that it is a good idea to have an eye examination every two years? The three-year period is simply a device to try to minimise the effect of what the Government are doing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) said that he will not advise Opposition Members to oppose the measure in the Lobby tonight, and he gave one or two reasons for that. However, the overwhelming reason is that it is actually now in operation. It is a peculiar Parliament which discusses the propriety and appropriateness of regulations 12 days after they were put into operation. We should protest about that.

I have one or two more things to say about the date of operation. I do not know whether the Ministers realise it,

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

but family practitioner committees throughout the country were unable to give authoritative advice to opticians about the date of operation of the change within two weeks of it being due to come into effect. Family practitioner committees were telephoned by opticians within a fortnight of 1 April, asking, "Is it 1 April? When is it? We do not know. We have had no information." The committees had to say, "We do not know. We have had no information either." That is an extraordinary way to proceed.

I have sat through proceedings in which the phrase "removing burdens from business" has been repeated ad nauseam. I am amazed to find that people who use that argument as a justification for removing rights from working people should be so insensitive to the needs of business as to carry out this change in such a way. I will tell the House exactly what has happened. The Minister has not bothered to do so. The date of operation was a dark secret even from family practitioner committees, on whom opticians rely for their authoritative information. Family practitioner committees received the appropriate forms only within a few days of the magic date of 1 April, so in many areas the forms had to be delivered by hand to opticians in order that they might have them when they would have to be used.

When the opticians got the forms they looked at them. What did they find? I do not know how much the Minister knows about this matter. In fact, I am working on the basis that Ministers know nothing, but I thought that someone in the Department would know one or two things. I thought that after more than 40 years of printing forms for eye examinations the Department would know that opticians, and everybody else who has anything to do with eye examinations or with the prescription or provision of glasses—indeed, anything at all to do with eyes—works on the basis of "Right first, left second." Everything is written in that way. This Government, who boast of removing the burdens from business, managed to produce an assortment of forms, all of which were printed on the basis of "Left eye first, right eye second." So the opticians, whom the Minister expects to give their services free, are having to cross out the wrong words and write in the correct words. That is having to be done for every patient in every optical practice—and, having seen the forms, I can tell the Minister that there is not much space.

This is the absolute botch-up, the howler of a procedure that the Government have presided over. Yet they are the Government who propose, within the next two years, to change the whole operation of every hospital in the country and GPs' practices—to do things for which no factual basis has been laid, things which, apart from the fact that they are wrong anyway, cannot be carried out in an efficient way.

This one limited area, involving such simple things as which eye is described first, could be taken as a tiny case study of what is likely to happen. I dare say that surgeons sometimes have to fill in forms and that they have procedures. I should not like them to mix up right legs and left legs, as opticians may be at risk of mixing up right eyes and left eyes.

But that is not the only error. It is not even possible to use carbon paper, so names and addresses have to be written in twice because the form is designed in such a way as to make it impossible to fill it in rationally. That is what the party of business—the party concerned to remove burdens from business—has managed to do to optical practices throughout the country.

But there is worse to come. Having failed to persuade opticians to give "freebies", the Government have introduced the idea of "cheapies". I shall not go on at length about this, though it is certainly relevant to the regulations that we are discussing. For example, if a person does not realise at the time of the test that he is entitled to a free National Health Service eye examination but realises later that he was so entitled, then he will be entitled to a refund of the cost of the test. I do not know what is in Ministers' minds, but if such a person were to opt for a "cheapie" test, if it ever became possible, what refund would he get? Having been entitled to a full eye examination, he would not have received one. So what would happen? The Government are getting into really deep water.

But, on the principle, they are getting into even deeper water. If optometrists or ophthalmic medical practitioners could invite patients to sign pieces of paper to the effect that it is all right if they are not given a full examination, that is tantamount to saying, "Sign to say that it is OK if I am negligent." The idea that that is in any way proper or desirable, or likely to lead to the protection of the nation's eye health, is just ludicrous. That, however, is what is proposed. At least that is the proposal which is the subject of consultation. I was surprised when the Minister told us that consultation is still taking place, but that gave me some hope, as the original time limit has expired. I hope that that example of unusual delicacy means that the Government are having second thoughts. I can tell the Minister that if there are not second thoughts, there will be severe trouble. Surely the Government are not prepared to say to professional people, "Ignore your common law duty of care to your patients; get them to sign to say that it is all right if you do not do it properly." Surely the Government cannot expect that approach to be accepted. As I wish trouble to be saved all round, I hope that the Government will proceed no further with that ludicrous suggestion.

If the Government take the matter further, it will be because they have been caught out after having promised that the cost of an eye examination would vanish into thin air, or that it would be provided as a mere bagatelle, for nothing or next to nothing. They will have been caught out in misleading the public and they will be looking for an alternative. The alternative will damage those who, because of lack of knowledge, or through poverty, succumb to the Government's blandishments. In effect, the Government will say, "It is all right. Assume that you do not really need a proper eye examination. Trust to luck and pay £5 instead of £10." Conservative care of eyes brings us to that.

11.27 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary dealt in detail with the practicalities of the regulations. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) and the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) spoke about the principle that lies behind the regulations and behind charging, and it is on the principle that I wish shortly to detain the House.

Although the National Health Service costs the average family about £35 a week—about £1,820 a year—the service that it provides is all too often seen as costless by both those who use it and those who work in the Health Service. Payment for service is never mentioned. It is not discussed or itemised, and there are many who are unaware of or unconcerned about what the NHS costs. That has important implications for the use of the services that are provided.

It is right that the NHS should be free to those who need its services at the time that they need them, and be paid for mainly out of taxation. That has been the principle of the NHS ever since it came into being in 1948. From almost the first day of the service, however, it became clear that there would be concern about costs. Whenever NHS charges are introduced or debated in the House, or in the country, there is a tendency for the Opposition, and some of my hon. Friends, to treat them as the first charges to be introduced. Charges were first introduced by the Labour Government who introduced the NHS in 1948. By 1949, they had had to introduce charges. They recognised that it was impossible to sustain the costs of the NHS without charges.

One of the criticisms made about the measures that the Government intend to introduce is that they may reduce spending on the NHS. That was one of Beveridge's intentions. He and those who introduced the NHS thought that by having a National Health Service that would improve patient care the amount of money spent on the Health Service would be reduced. The NHS was introduced in 1948 on that basis.

The Labour Government soon found that if there was infinite demand, there was an infinite cost. Therefore, by 1949—only a year later—Cripps, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, was obliged to bring in legislation to introduce prescription charges. They did not become effective until 1951 when Gaitskell was Chancellor of the Exchequer. In the Budget of that year, on what did that same Labour Government introduce charges? I will tell my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth: they introduced charges on teeth and spectacles. So there is nothing new about charges for some items. They have been in force almost as long as the National Health Service itself.

The charges that were introduced in 1951 did not apply to needy categories of patients who were exempt. I strongly suspect that if we were to check what categories were exempt in 1951, we would find that they do not differ substantially from the categories which will be exempt now.

There is nothing new in the concept of charges for certain items under the National Health Service. That concept was introduced as far back as 1949 by the Labour Government, the very same Government that only a year before had introduced the National Health Service. They brought in the charges because they recognised that there were certain items for which there was a need to raise money; they also recognised that there was a need to ensure that people had some appreciation that those services were not totally without cost.

When we are debating the National Health Service in future I hope that there can be at least a little intellectual honesty about the history of the introduction of the service. Hon. Members should realise that while we are giving a first-class service through the NHS it is on occasions necessary to make modest charges for certain items.

11.31 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Understandably my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) concentrated on the new arrangements for eye examinations and the charges being introduced by the Government. I agree entirely with his comments and with the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise).

I want to deal with a different aspect of the regulations. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State emphasised that we are debating 12 separate statutory instruments. I listened carefully to what he said. He stopped, as I thought, in mid flight and unfortunately made no reference to the last four statutory instruments on the Order Paper. I refer specifically to the National Health Service (Travelling Expenses and Remission of Charges) Amendment Regulations 1989. There are four sets of regulations on that matter, Nos. 517, 393, 614 and 616.

The first two of those statutory instruments—Nos. 517 and 393—affect the amount of contribution assessed for a non-dependant living in the home of someone who is applying for a voucher for glasses. The second pair of regulations amend the first two, because the Government got it wrong when they published the original regulations in March.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) referred to these regulations, but even he underestimated the effect of the increases in the contributions that are assessed for non-dependants living in the homes of people who are applying for assistance for the cost of glasses. He rightly pointed out that there is a deduction for housing costs for the assessed contributions which will affect the amount given to assist someone who has a voucher. The real effect is not just £12·50 at the top of the scale. It could be as much as three times that amount.

If the hon. Member for Southport works through the calculations, he will find that the excess of income over resources for any applicant for assistance is multiplied by a factor of three. It follows that, if income equals requirements—according to the income support regulations and calculations—that applicant will find that he or she is contributing three times the amount of the deduction from housing costs. It can be three times £12·50 in a family where one non-dependant has an income of more than £52·10 per week. A penal contribution can be expected from someone who has a voucher.

The Under-Secretary of State told the House that the value of vouchers has been increased by 5 per cent. and that in his opinion the charges were reasonable. As I have already mentioned, he did not touch on those four statutory instruments and, therefore, he did not give himself the opportunity to point out the amount of the increase in those assessed contributions towards housing costs for non-dependants living in the homes of applicants for help. If he had touched on that, he would have had to tell the House that the Government have introduced a contribution for a non-dependant who is under 25 years old and receiving income support. That new contribution is introduced by these regulations at the rate of £3. That contribution of £3 can be multiplied by a factor of three, so that the parent—who may be a man or woman pensioner—can be asked to contribute as much as £9 towards the cost of glasses as a result of that under 25-year-old person on income support living at home. That, of course, is a new introduction and the increase is

[Mr. Terry Davis]

infinite. However, the increase is more than double for someone in the middle of the scale, because the contribution is being increased from £3·45 to £7·20 for a non-dependant whose income is less than £49·20. At the so-called top end of the scale, for someone whose income exceeds £52·10 a week the contribution is being increased from £8·20 to £12·50, which is an increase of more than 50 per cent. Those are massive increases by any stretch of the imagination or calculation. They are increases that, by definition, are being applied to families who are living in poverty. It is, in effect, increasing a tax that is paid by poor families. It is paid often by pensioners, who are applying for assistance with the cost of necessary glasses, and who happen to have a non-dependant—often a grown-up son or daughter—in their homes.

The Minister did not give himself the chance to tell us how many people are affected by those increases. I hope that, when his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland replies to the debate, he will tell us how many people will be adversely affected by the increases in the contributions of non-dependants covered by the four statutory instruments.

I want to mention another aspect of the regulations because the House should be concerned not only with what is happening under these regulations, but with what has happened as a result of the regulations that the statutory instruments amend. In other words, the House should be concerned about what has happened during the past 12 months.

My interest in this detailed but important aspect of the regulations arose as a result of a constituent's inquiry. I engaged in correspondence with the Department of Health about my constituent's case. My constituent is a pensioner and his wife is also receiving a retirement pension. Their combined pensions mean that they have an income slightly in excess of the level for income support. Therefore, a voucher is needed for glasses for the husband. Their grown-up son lives in their home and that son did not want to tell his parents—and did not see why he should tell the Government—the amount of his wages every week. Under the old regulations, before the changes that were made about a year ago, he did not have to reveal his wages because the contribution towards housing costs was a standard amount and there was no inquiry into income or means or into the financial affairs of a non-dependent grown-up son or daughter living with retired people. The Government have now introduced a means test for such non-dependants and that son now has to tell the Government and his parents, because he has to put his income on the form, the amount of his weekly income. He refused to do that because he said he did not see why he should have to provide that information.

I wrote to the Minister and asked the reason for the information about income. I received a courteous reply, but the letter did not tell me what I most wanted to know, which was what would happen if my constituent's son still refused to give the information. I received another reply from the Minister who told me that the non-dependant's contribution would be assessed at the maximum rate. The Minister's letter contained detailed figures. When I checked those figures with the assistance of the Library staff, I found that they bore no relation to the figures that had been approved by the House a year ago in statutory instruments. They were on a different scale.

Within 24 hours I contacted the Minister's office and 10 weeks later I received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security telling me that the instructions issued to the agency benefit unit were incorrect. That was in the middle of January. For months the agency benefit unit had been assessing non-dependant's contributions on incorrect instructions. In every case, the non-dependant's contribution was assessed at £3 more than it should have been under the regulations approved by the House.

I have already explained how the amount to be paid by a person with a voucher is calculated. The penalty, the excess which someone—often a pensioner—has to contribute, can be as much as £9, three times the £3 mistake. In his letter the Minister was kind enough to tell me that fresh instructions would be issued to the agency benefit unit. The House will be pleased to learn that after 10 weeks the Government took the action that was necessary to correct their inaccurate instructions. Can the Minister say how many people were adversely affected by the mistake? How many paid £3 or £9 or an amount in between which they should not have paid for glasses? What have the Government done to refund the money that those people have paid? I await answers to those questions with great interest.

11.42 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I shall be brief. I should like to make a comment and a plea to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench. My comment is that, in this debate and in the other debates that we had on these charges in November and seven or eight months earlier, it has been said that the amount raised by these charges is insignificant. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) spoke about a "piddling measure". There is some uncertainty about whether the amount raised by the dental and optical charges will be £140 million or £150 million. That amount is by no means insignificant.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has just left the Chamber, because I wanted to remind him and the House of what he said in the Budget debate. He spoke about the likely cost of the tax relief of £40 million a year for private medical insurance for old age pensioners. He said:

> "£40 million is sufficient to pay the annual salaries of 3,000 nurses or 1,000 consultants. It is enough to purchase 20,000 ventilators or 1,300 ambulances. It is enough to meet the operating costs of 35,000 cataract removals or of 17,000 hip replacements."—[*Official Report*, 16 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 569.]

That is what can be done with £40 million. These measures raise about three and a half times that figure, so we are not talking about an insignificant amount.

The Minister pointed out that the take-up is increasing. It happens when charges are changed—this has occurred for the last 30 or 40 years—that for a month or two there is a small reduction in demand. Over a period—say, when we review the position in a year or two—we will find that there has not been a significant change.

In the three speeches that I have made in the House on this issue I have appealed to the Government to introduce a new contract for general dental practitioners. Members of the dental profession are disappointed that negotiations

on a new contract have not yet commenced. There is fear that perhaps the profession has missed the boat and that the new contract will not appear.

It is appreciated that, with the general practitioner contract being in the forefront of the Government's mind, the dental profession may have to be patient. I hope that the Minister will repeat the assurance that was given as long ago as last June—that the Government are determined to negotiate and introduce a new contract for general dental practitioners.

The present arrangements for remunerating dentists are 40 years old and out of date. We must have a new arrangement which reflects modern trends in dentistry—the reduction in dental decay—and which will be more beneficial to patients and the profession.

When we discussed these issues on 1 November last, I said that the introduction of charges of this type was often an unpopular step. But I urge hon. Members to reflect that an unpopular measure does not always mean that what is proposed is unreasonable. What the Government propose is right and is in the interest of the NHS, and I hope the House will not divide on it tonight.

11.47 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): At this hour I will be brief and simply put a few questions to the members of the Treasury Bench, and particularly to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, who will reply to the debate. My hon. Friends will be aware that I was one of those on the Government Benches who strongly opposed the introduction of charges for dental inspections and eye examinations.

Does not the introduction of charges in these spheres fly in the face of the philosophy of preventive medicine, which I thought was a No. 1 priority with the Government? Preventive medicine can save money. After all, if relatively cheap treatments are carried out early enough, the heavy cost of certain eye and dental treatments can be avoided. In other words, the small sums of money to which we are referring in these charges could be dissipated in other ways.

Is the Minister aware of the co-operation which to date has often existed between opticians and optometrists and eye hospitals in centres of excellence, where competent and able professional optometrists have assisted eye hospitals and taken the pressure off those hospitals, to the advantage of the NHS as a whole? I understand from the profession of optometrists and opticians that, because of the implementation of charges, that relationship is likely to be destroyed or, at best, undermined.

My colleagues on the Conservative Benches often talk about the great benefits of the untrammelled free market. We have seen the problems that can occur with the untrammelled free market in the City and the disasters that resulted from that. It would be constructive, rational and sensible to discuss these proposals with the professions that will be involved, as they are intimately well informed about these matters. The professions should be consulted before the Government introduce measures—and in this case charges—which will affect two very important sectors of the National Health Service.

I believe that the professional services do not always need to be open to the free market to provide the best possible service to the people of this country. As I have said, in certain areas we can see that the Government are forcing the free market upon the professions. The morality, discipline and self-discipline of those professions are disappearing and the public are suffering dramatically as a result. Costs are also rising.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that people will be able to shop around. Should people who require professional skilled help have to shop around? Do they not go to a professionally qualified person and expect to receive good and reliable treatment? If they have to pay for that treatment, do they not expect it to be provided at an acceptable and reasonable price?

I do not believe that costs are involved in the issues that we are considering today. Many people who require help are least able to shop around and take advantage of what my hon. Friend the Minister described as the free market. I speak with some knowledge about these matters as I have served on the Select Committee on Social Services for many years and I have met many people concerned with the professions who have expressed dissatisfaction and unhappiness that the Government are following this road. They do not believe—and I do not believe—that the public and those who require treatment and assistance will benefit.

It is extraordinary that the House should debate a matter at this time of night which involves a maximum, as I understand it, of £60 million, when these measures will result in substantial additional costs on the Health Service in future.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench realise that opposition to the charges does not rest exclusively with the Opposition parties. It is felt very deeply on the Conservative Benches as well—and not because we are dogmatic or trying to appeal to groups outside the House whose votes we may need at the next election. Those of us who voted against the charges during debates on the Health and Medicines Bill did so because we were convinced that the Government had not presented a good case and because going against the philosophy of preventive medicine would not benefit the people of this country.

11.53 pm

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I want first to thank the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). He dealt with the broad general principles involved with the charges for eye tests and the question of preventive medicine. We have debated those issues before and, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield spoke about them so eloquently, he has removed from me the obligation to deal with them tonight. I am grateful to him for his contribution about the general principles.

As the Minister said, there are 12 sets of regulations before us, half referring to England and Wales and the other half to Scotland. There are no significant differences between those two groups so I shall not confine my remarks to one or the other.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), I want to concentrate on the regulations which deal with charges for general ophthalmic services and those dealing with exemptions. Having heard the hon. Members for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) and for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I take more than a passing interest in the regulations dealing with charges and, in particular, wig charges in the NHS. That is not because of my particular problem in that regard. I take a passing interest having

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

been responsible for great charges for wigs in a former life because of the nature of my work. It was part of my work dealing with patients who had what is known as traumatic alopecia, which involves having one's head shaved prior to a particular procedure. That was expensive, but I was not aware of the charges at that stage.

The hon. Member for Ryedale pointed out that it was important to know of the charges because that reflected a discipline within those who work in and use the services. I changed my practice so that that expense did not fall on the NHS. I did so with no knowledge of the charges, simply because I thought that it was necessary. My point is that it is not necessary to know of the charges in order to change practice. I also did so without a budget of my own and without my hospital opting out. I think that saved the NHS a considerable amount. That is one reason for my interest in that.

I was interested to hear the hon. Members for Banbury and for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) talking about the introduction of charges. When the Health and Medicines Bill was debated in Committee I made a deal with the right hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) that as long as I accepted that the Labour party was the first to introduce charges, he would never mention the matter again.

However, the important point about charges, which was touched on by the hon. Member for Macclesfield, is that the charges that we are debating are different in concept. Previous charges have been made for the provision of treatment. These charges are for screening processes. If someone has a problem and needs treatment for which there is a charge, there is a deterrent effect, but the treatment is likely to be taken up. However, if someone is told there is probably nothing wrong with him but it would be useful to be screened for which there would be a charge, that does have a deterrent effect. There is an important quantitative difference in charges for screening processes.

The Minister said that he thought that it would be—to use his word—unlikely that charges would have a deterrent effect. When we debated the Health and Medicines Bill in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston read out various statements that were made, such as that it was unlikely that the charge would stay the same, that the charge would go down or that it was likely to go down. That has not been borne out by fact.

I have no confidence that, as the Minister suggested, the market will regulate costs and the price will go down. As the hon. Member for Macclesfield said, the market is not quite the same in health care as elsewhere. A colleague of mine in private practice wished to reduce his work load. He thought that the way to do that was to put his prices up. Much to his amazement, rather than reduce it, it significantly increased the number of people who came to him. It is an American philosophy, apparently, of which I was not aware, that the way to attract patients is to put the price up because they think that they are getting a better service. I am not confident that prices will fall. The market does not operate in health care. All our experience of health care systems that operate a pricing mechanism is that prices inevitably rise.

The Minister said that prices will not prove a deterrent. He said that 2 million pensioners will be exempt. He did not mention that that means that 7·7 million will not be. He said that even those who are not exempt will be eligible for subsidy if their income is just above income support level. I hope the Minister realises that, to get the subsidy, people have to fill out a lengthy form. It will surprise such people to be asked on the form

"Are you going to visit someone in prison?"

Pensioners and others who want to claim for an eyesight test will wonder what on earth that has to do with their vision.

This complex application form includes many questions:

"Do you and your partner have a home improvement loan or loan for repairs? . . . We will get in touch with you about this . . . Do you or your partner get housing benefit? Tell us the full amount for rent and rates and the amount for rent after housing benefit is taken away. This will be the actual amount of rent you pay . . . If you or your partner are a council tenant, or if you agree that the council will pay housing benefit straight to your landlord or landlady . . ."

and so on. I hope that the Minister gets the point. These complicated methods of claiming help for those just above income support are a disincentive to claiming.

The regulations on general ophthalmic services list those who will gain exemption. The Minister also read out the list of those who will be exempt; I ask him for an assurance that it will be kept under review. One or two necessary exemptions may not have been included. These exemptions were wrung out of the Government in Committee and on Report. One of the concessions that we obtained was that for people aged 40 or over who are the parents, brothers, sisters or children of people diagnosed as suffering from glaucoma. Grandparents are missing from the list. Will the Minister include them? There are not many of them, and I see no valid reason for their exclusion.

Will the Minister consider exempting patients with cataracts? By that, I do not mean those whose condition has been dealt with—they will be eligible because of their complex optical appliances—but those who have been diagnosed and are having regular examinations.

On Report, the Minister of State gave an undertaking that the uptake of tests and waiting lists in hospitals would be closely monitored. What systems are in place to enable that monitoring to be done? If there is evidence of lower take-up, will the Government reconsider this matter?

The Minister asked for our comments on a matter that is not in the regulations; I am only too pleased to give him mine. I was surprised that the two-tier sight tests were proposed at all. On Report, the right hon. Member for Braintree introduced what is now section 14 of the Act. He told us then that new clause 15 was

"essentially a consumer protection provision".

He said that it differed from the original clause, and had therefore been tabled rather than a mere amendment, in that

"we have decided that it is right to take the power, which curiously does not exist at present, to specify clearly in regulations what duties a practitioner must perform as part of a sight test.

As the House is aware, the sight test is generally understood and expected to include a test to establish whether spectacles are required, and an eye examination in which signs of injury . . . may be detected . . . It is our intention that, under whatever arrangements people receive a sight test, there should be certainty about what they are getting and that it should include a proper eye examination."—[*Official Report*, 13 April 1988; Vol. 131, c. 226.]

The right hon. Gentleman did not say that it might. He did not say that there would be a differential in sight tests. That is what we were led to believe, and that was our understanding. Imagine our surprise when we found that

the proposal was not for a proper eye test, but for a two-tier test. One tier will be for refraction of vision; the other will be the full eye test.

I ask the Minister to consider that proposal very carefully. He said that he might be swayed by argument, and I trust that I will be able to persuade him not to introduce the two-tier test. For ophthalmic medical practitioners it will pose considerable ethical problems, based on what is expected under the General Medical Council's "fitness to practise" rules and regulations, under which it is incumbent on them to do whatever they think necessary.

I understand that under the proposals the ophthalmic medical practitioner or optician will have to state clearly that two sight tests are available, and that one will not include the full examination. What will be the position should a patient present to an ophthalmic medical practitioner or optician and agree to the simple sight test but not to the full examination? In the course of that test, either from the history or from the initial sight test, what will happen if the practitioner feels, on the basis of either the patient's history or the initial test, that a further examination is necessary? Will the patient be entitled to that further examination free, or will he have to pay for it? Can he opt out of having the test at all? That will, as I have said, present an ethical problem; more important, it will present a considerable health problem for the patient.

Throughout the Committee and Report stages of the Bill much emphasis was put on the need for a full eye examination, rather than an examination limited to a test of vision. I hope that the Minister will consider carefully before proposing regulations for a two-tier examination. I assure him that Opposition Members will vote against any such regulations.

12.7 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I am happy to give the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) the assurance that he sought that the exemptions will be kept under review. I am sure that he will recognise that as we are currently considering the results of consultation on the question of a two-tier test—as he describes it—his comments will have been heard by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and will be taken into account.

The concept of asking patients to make a contribution towards the cost of their treatment is not new, and certainly not original to the present Government, as the hon. Gentleman himself acknowledged and as was emphasised by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry). It is therefore difficult to understand the protests being made about the rational development of that principle. What is even stranger is the challenge to measures concerned with providing relief from charges for those on low incomes.

The hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden asked me whether there would be proper systems to review the take-up of sight tests, both private and NHS. We will certainly undertake a survey of private tests through NOP in the autumn. He also asked about cataract sufferers, who will be able to obtain free NHS sight tests if they are referred by their hospital consultants.

The hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden complained about the problems of form filling, particularly for the elderly. I have a certain amount of sympathy with the hon. Member for Southport's complaints about form AG1, which is a daunting prospect for some people, although research has shown consistently that the key element as to how well claimants deal with forms is the clarity of individual pages and not the overall length of the form. However, I dare say that the hon. Gentleman's experience, like mine, is probably not entirely in line with those findings. He will be delighted to know that we are currently reviewing the form to find out how it can be improved. I stress that people receiving income support or family credit get free treatment automatically and others on low income can claim help.

The hon. Member for Southport also asked about the sight tests being provided through British Home Stores at £2·50 for pensioners. He asked whether they were proper sight tests. I understand that they include a full eye examination, so what my right hon. and learned Friend said to the House appears to be taking place.

A number of points were raised by the hon. Member for Southport, the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden and my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) about the deterrent effect of charges. It is not accepted and never was throughout the debates on the Health and Medicines Act that charges will have any deterrent effect. When the supply of NHS spectacles ended it was argued that people would be deterred from going to the optician. That has not been the case and spectacle sales and sight tests have increased. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) stressed that point in respect of dental examinations and charges. That did not persuade my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) or my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield who were concerned about the apparent contradiction between bringing in charges for dental examinations and our clear commitment to preventive medicine.

The dental examination charge is in no way contrary to the philosophy of prevention set out in "Promoting Better Health". It still pays to visit the dentist regularly. Moreover, the charge will help to release some £50 million, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale pointed out, for positive measures to encourage the prevention of dental disease, including fluoridation, improved and more widespread vocational and postgraduate training for dentists and a new programme to promote dental awareness among young people. It will also help to finance preventive measures in other primary care services.

The hon. Member for Southport asked about backlogs and the use of discretion for late claims for refunds. He is quite right that there have been some delays in processing claims for help with NHS costs. However, I am pleased to say that from a peak of more than 9,000 cases, the agency benefits unit had reduced the stockpile to about 2,500 cases on Monday and had cleared it completely by this morning. People who have incurred NHS costs while waiting for their claims to be assessed will be able to claim a refund and will include those who have purchased glasses or contact lenses following a sight test. The normal one month for claiming a refund will not apply. I hope that that meets the hon. Gentleman's point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth asked about the cost of dental and sight tests for the unemployed. The unemployed people who are receiving

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

income support, as most unemployed people are, get free dental and sight tests, free dental treatment and full-value vouchers for glasses as well as free prescriptions.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) complained about the design of the forms which have been issued. The first two batches of forms from the printers did have reversed prescription details. That error has now been corrected and the forms which are due for delivery to family practitioner committees next week are correct. The hon. Lady was also concerned about a delay in issuing instructions. Revised instructions were issued to health authorities and family practitioner committees to arrive no later than 21 March. That gave them sufficient time to issue them to their practitioners, but I understand that some delayed issuing them until Friday 31 March.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) complained about the regulations amending the scheme for helping people with low incomes and about incorrect instructions being issued. The amending regulations simply ensure that the scheme for help with NHS costs is kept in line with the income support scheme on which it is based. The hon. Gentleman asked about the number of people who had been affected because for part of the year 1988-89 the agency benefits unit was not assessing claims strictly in accordance with the 1988 regulations. The cases concerned will be reviewed and we will be writing to the people concerned to find out whether they have paid more than they should have done.

Mr. Terry Davis: Given that the letter admitting that the incorrect instructions had been issued was sent to me by a Minister three months ago, surely the cases should have been reviewed by now.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman would like me to I shall ensure that I write to him to explain the background. It is a complex matter and I am sure that he will understand that every effort is being made to identify the people who may have suffered and to ensure that they are properly treated. I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman if that will be of assistance to him.

Mrs. Wise: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) appreciates the offer of a letter but this matter affects us all. The Minister should come to the House and explain how many people were wrongly assessed and tell us specifically when it is put right.

Mr. Forsyth: I understand that about 15,000 claims were affected by the error, but that does not mean that that is the number of people who will lose out. The hon. Lady should be concerned, as I am sure we all are, with the particular circumstances of those affected and I can give her an assurance that everything is being done to put matters right.

Mr. Terry Davis: The Minister would have had more time to obtain the information for which we are asking if his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary had given way during his speech because I would have put some questions to him which might have saved us all some time. The Minister has told us that 15,000 people have been affected. Can he tell us how many cases have been reviewed during the three months since the Government admitted to me that they had made a mistake? After all, it took them 10 weeks to write to me with that admission.

Mr. Forsyth: I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman that we will be writing to the people concerned to find out if they have paid more than they should and that we will ensure that the matter is put right. I would have thought that he would accept that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale asked about the new dental contract. I can give him the assurance that he sought. Negotiations will begin soon and I can repeat the assurances that have already been given to the profession about that. I am sure that he will welcome that.

I think that I have covered all the points raised in the debate. The regulations ensure that proper exemptions are made and that a balance is reached between obtaining a proper contribution from those who are able to afford it and those who are not. I commend the regulations to the House.

Question put and negatived.

Industry (Subsidies)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Maclean.]*

12.19 am

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): The debate tonight concerns unfair competition in the European Community and direct subsidising, which are against article 92 of the treaty of Rome and which deliberately and unfairly undercut jobs and industry in this country. Before going into the general, I want to go into the particular. I am speaking about a company in my constituency, Cossor Electronics, which has been there for a long time. It has a large, dedicated and professional work force who have worked hard to make the company the world leader, not only in electronic components, but especially in air traffic control. As it is the world leader, no one could have been more horrified than myself and my constituents to hear that in the past few weeks it has lost contracts in air traffic control to the value of £80 million, not through lack of keenness, competition or misunderstanding the market, but simply because of unfair competition from abroad.

That has happened in Australia, Thailand, Turkey and central America, and it could happen in other countries. The facts are simple. Two European member states—France and Italy—have been directly and illegally subsidising unfair competition, so much so that on the air traffic control contract that was awarded to the French and the Italians a few days ago in Australia they were able to offer their products at 40 per cent. below their own catalogue prices.

After dealing with the particular, I shall turn to the general. In the run-up to 1992, state aids could be used as an alternative to tariff barriers and other forms of protection. Uncontrolled state aids could be a threat to the unity of the Common Market and to the system of free competition. There is a danger that the combined effect of independently applied national policies would lead to incoherent, contradictory results at Community level. Only further Community control can ensure that any benefits obtained from state aid outweigh the resulting distortions in competition.

An interesting report was issued by the Commission only a few weeks ago. It is a survey of state aids and says that the total annual volume of state aid in 1986 amounted to about £65 billion, which represents 3 per cent. of gross domestic product, or £517 per employed person. The amounts are so high that not only are the effects on competition pronounced, but their macroeconomic impact cannot be ignored. Aids exceed direct taxes on companies, and constitute an important factor in budget deficits in certain member states.

It is worth looking at those countries which are abusing the system. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) is present. He has been working hard on behalf of his constituent company, Plessey, against unfair practices, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who cannot be present this evening but who supportss what my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South and I say.

We must look at the main villains. Italy gives about five times as much as France and Germany. Of the small member states, Greece and Ireland give a significant volume of aid. In 1986, the United Kingdom gave £1·9 billion in aid, France gave £3·6 billion, Germany gave £4·9 billion, and Italy gave £16 billion. In other words, Italy is now giving nearly nine times as much as the United Kingdom. Those results alone must show that a review of policy is essential.

In most member states, grants and straight tax reductions were the most common form of intervention. We must take into account that France and, to a lesser extent, Italy have been using more opaque forms of aid, namely equity participation, guarantees and soft loans. But we are talking about £65 billion of Community money being spent on feather-bedding industries. Of course one must understand that, to a certain extent, strategic industries and industries in difficulty—for example, coal, steel and railways—must be protected. But if one forgets those industries, over £30 billion of member states' money is being deliberately and illegally spent on unfairly feather-bedding industries and undercutting competition.

Just as the United Kingdom has been remarkable for its modesty in state aid, Italy has been remarkable for the extent of the aid that it has given. It has the most expensive regional policy for the less prosperous peripheral regions —one cannot complain about that—and it also has the largest interventionist industrial policy aids and the largest aids granted through public holding companies. In addition, apart from France, it has the largest aids for exports and, apart from Germany, the largest aids for research and development.

Yesterday, I flew to Brussels and had the opportunity of speaking to Sir Leon Brittan, the Commissioner with responsibility for competition policy, financial institutions. I am delighted to say that he gave a significant undertaking. He said that he intends to use much more actively the Commission's powers under article 93.1 to review the important existing aids which, by their nature and volume, adversely affect competition and intra-Community trade. Perhaps most important of all, although the Commission takes a strict line against aids for exports to other member states, no action has ever been taken on aids to exports to Third world countries. There is no doubt that such aids can distort competition inside the Community. The sheer volume of the aids and the large differences between member states make it essential to consider the position afresh.

The feather-bedding of nationalised industries must stop. There can be no room for policies that have the effect —even if it is not always the intention—of discriminating against the private sector. The private sector must be allowed to compete on equal terms. It must be the market, and not state aid, that is allowed to rationalise the industrial structure and determine the number of firms that should be allowed to compete.

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that the bid by GEC—Siemens for Plessey will be particularly affected by the fact that, because the German telecommunications industry is heavily subsidised, the real cost of producing equipment in Germany is considerably higher than it is here? Consequently that company will not be able to compete internationally. In those circumstances, unemployment will be created because Japan and other countries would be able to undermine our industry.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend makes his point very well indeed. This is the difficulty. More than £30 billion of Community money, member states' money, is being spent on feather-bedding state industries, at the expense of fair

[Mr. Hayes]

competition. Let us have a free market, let us have a situation in which we can compete, but let us compete on equal terms. Let us have a level playing field. At present the playing field is not level; it is slanted against the companies in my hon. Friend's constituency and in my constituency.

Let us make no mistake: it is not only firms and jobs in Ilford, South and in Harlow that will be at risk; firms and jobs in every constituency will be at risk unless the Commission acts quickly, and unless—and this is where I bring my hon. Friend the Minister in—the Department of Trade and Industry makes it absolutely clear that it will not put up with unfair competition. My hon. Friend will have to say, "Let's have the evidence", but he knows as well as I do that this is going on. If this is what the French and the Italians are doing to British industry now, what on earth will happen to jobs in our constituencies, to the people who have been working hard to make this country competitive and a great exporter again, after 1992 unless the Government and the Commission act quickly?

12.33 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Robert Atkins): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) on raising this topic. We have come to expect him to show, on any occasion, that he is happy to draw attention to the interests of his constituents. The case that he made tonight, and has made on other occasions, is one that we view with considerable concern. Obviously, I am impressed that my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) is in the House. His presence adds weight to the case that my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow makes.

It is worth dealing specifically with the case of Cossor, which I know is dear to my hon. Friend's heart, and which he raised with Sir Leon Brittan yesterday. My experience of the aerospace industry, both with my hon. Friends on the Back Benches and now as a Minister, leads me to believe that there is quite a lot going on about which we might be concerned. However, my hon. Friend, as a lawyer, will understand better than most that demonstrating proof is very different from having suspicions. We have to consider how best to go about doing just that.

I am aware that Cossor Electronics, which is a fine company—as is Plessey, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South—and the United Kingdom ground radar industry generally, is meeting strong competition from other European suppliers and overseas markets. The consequences of a continuing loss of business in this market are of great concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow rightly stressed that his constituency and others will be affected if the loss continues.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow is aware, my Department stands ready to intervene on the company's behalf, with the appropriate authorities, providing that real evidence can be presented on the origin and destination of the alleged subsidies. It is regrettable that at present we have seen no hard evidence, although we may have some suspicions. I am alive to those suspicions becoming hard evidence. If my hon. Friend can give me more information, or if company representatives can do so, I shall be more than happy to act and to encourage the Department to pursue the matter with the Commission. I await that information.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow touched on the general principle of state aids, and I shall dwell on it in a more general sense as I believe that the House will value my doing so. One of the Government's basic aims is to encourage and secure an environment in which business can operate freely on the basis of fair competition in an open market. In the European Community too, competition policy has been seen as crucial to securing the Community's basic aims.

With the coming of the single European market, state aids and other elements of competition policy become even more important. Once the single market is established, state aids will be virtually the only remaining instrument of protection available to member states against competition within the Community. Firm and even-handed enforcement of the state aid rules is therefore a vital factor in the creation and maintenance of a genuinely single market. It is essential that barriers to trade within the Community are not replaced with illegal or unjustified subsidies which serve only to protect uncompetitive industry. Indeed, industry in the Community will not win in world markets through that sort of protection.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow referred to feather-bedding, and his point was well taken. Efficient companies, which should benefit from the single market, would be prevented fully from using the advantages that they have gained through their efficiency. They may be deterred from exploiting their advantage if they believe that this may provoke distortions of competition in other member states. As a member of the international trading community, the EC cannot only look inwards. It must uphold and respect the rules imposed under other international agreements. It is therefore especially important for the Community, as well as for the United Kingdom, that the state aid regime is enforced rigorously and even-handedly. I should make it clear exactly what that regime is.

The rules are laid down in the treaty of Rome. They concern any aid granted by member states or through state resources which distorts, or threatens to distort, competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods. The treaty does not identify what counts as an aid. It can be any form of subsidy, any relief from financial burdens such as taxation or social security benefits or interest on loans, or any other measures with similar effect. All aids are considered to be incompatible with the Common Market in so far as they affect trade between member states, unless they can be justified by providing some compensating Community benefit.

The treaty of Rome lays down those general rules. It also gives the Commission power to enforce them and lays down the procedure for so doing. Member states must notify to the Commission all plans to grant aid or to change their arrangements for granting it. This applies to schemes for granting aid and, sometimes, to individual projects. The Commission is then responsible for scrutinising the proposal to determine whether it is compatible with the Common Market. If it cannot agree following this examination, it can open a formal investigation procedure and consult all member states

about the proposal. The Commission may then agree the proposal, amend it or impose conditions, or reject it entirely.

Member states may not pay aid until their proposal has been agreed by the Commission. If a member state pays an illegal aid, the Commission can order the aid to be repaid —that means clawing it back from the recipients—and it can take member states to the European Court of Justice to have its decisions supported.

The Commission can also investigate aids which are being paid by member states under schemes already in force, either on its own initiative or as a result of a complaint. I anticipate such a complaint from my hon. Friends in due course. If the aid is found not to be compatible with the Common Market, the Commission can order the scheme to be changed or stopped or, in extreme cases, the aid reclaimed.

All that underlines the fact that clear rules exist in the Community to secure fair competition and to ensure that subsidies do not distort trade. The key point is to have the rules enforced by the Commission in a rigorous and even-handed manner. My hon. Friend emphasised that strongly. The Commission has been tightening up markedly over the past few years, and it intends to continue doing so.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the visit and to the comments of our erstwhile colleague, Sir Leon Brittan. He said only a few weeks ago that firm control can ensure that the benefits derived from state aids will outweigh any distortions of competition. He pointed to recent work by the Commission to identify the full extent of aids granted by the different member states. My hon. Friends will be pleased to know that the United Kingdom came out of the analysis relatively well.

Since the early 1980s, the level of United Kingdom subsidies has been on a firm downward trend, while that in other major member states has been upwards, in some cases markedly so. My hon. Friend referred to some of those countries. The Commission believes that little of the aid has been accompanied by positive benefits, that it has simply served to cancel out similar aids in other member states. The Commission therefore intends to review all existing aid schemes, as well as new schemes for which the Commission's approval is being sought. Without a firm and comprehensive policy of this kind, Sir Leon saw little possibility of completing the single market, and he committed himself to allowing undistorted competition to play its rightful role. The Commission's analysis is not yet complete, but Sir Leon has said that it is already clear to him that urgent action is needed, and clear also where changes have to be made.

My hon. Friend made several references to cases and countries that he knows of, and to the figures involved. Sir Leon is addressing the matter in the terms that my hon. Friend has talked about. I trust that in due course, although it may take longer than my hon. Friend and I wish, we will be able to resolve the problem. I can assure the House and my hon. Friends that the Commission will have the Government's full support in its work. The creation of the single market requires no less if we are to secure its benefits.

The position of individual British companies must also be considered when they run up against unfair competition from elsewhere in the Community. It is worth distinguishing here between subsidies which are illegal— that is, those that have not been notified to the European Commission or are not covered by an approved scheme —and subsidies that have been notified and approved by the Commission. In the case of illegal subsidies, the Government will do their utmost to pursue with the Commission the cases of British firms which have suffered because of illegal subsidies granted to their competitors.

My officials are always ready to discuss with firms what it takes to mount a persuasive case. The main requirement is to obtain hard evidence that the European competitor has received a subsidy and that the subsidy is likely to fall outside schemes which have been approved by the Commission. This is an area in which the Commission is particularly concerned, and I have every confidence that it will follow up complaints to the best of its ability. It has at its disposal the range of sanctions to which I referred earlier.

In the case of legal subsidies, the scope for immediate action is more limited, but where subsidies can be shown to put British firms at a disadvantage, we may be able to persuade the Commission that wider Community principles are at stake. As Sir Leon Brittan said, the Commission is concerned about the high level of subsidies which it has itself approved over the years and it intends to review these comprehensively. The Government would certainly urge the Commission to give priority to those which clearly disadvantage British companies as well as distorting trade within the Community more generally.

To sum up, the Government believe that rigorous and even-handed enforcement of the state aid rules is crucial to securing free and fair competition within the European Community. That in turn is vital for creating and maintaining a genuinely single market in Europe. We shall do our utmost to ensure that British firms have the opportunity to share in the benefits which an open market can bring.

Both of my hon. Friends the Members for Harlow and for Ilford, South, who have addressed the House cogently and articulately on the problem, are to be congratulated on the concern that they have shown for their constituents. They have my assurance that I and other Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry will do all we can to ensure that British companies get a fair crack of the whip on an even playing field or, indeed, according to any other analogy that can be drawn.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow has seen fit to draw this matter to the House's attention. If he or a company in his constituency or that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South can find the hard evidence, I assure them that we shall wage war to the highest possible level to ensure that all is fair in that difficult area.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 April 1989

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Thursday 20 April.

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PORTS (HULL) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 20 April.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Tuesday 18 April at 7 o'clock.

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

WENTWORTH ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE SOUTHBANK BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 20 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Community Volunteers

1. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will explain the purposes and duties of the proposed community volunteers schemes.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): The Government have not formulated proposals for community volunteer schemes in the field of crime prevention. Members of the public are already contributing directly to crime prevention by joining neighbourhood watch and crime prevention panels. We encourage those wishing to give more active support to the police to join the special constabulary.

Mr. Morgan: In the light of the Home Secretary's recent speeches on the matter, will the Minister tell the House the relevance of the proposals for unpaid volunteers and special constables to solve the special problems which exist, such as the fear that women feel when travelling on the Underground at night and the problem of lager louts massing outside pubs and night clubs? Is it not really a matter of training workers without uniforms to do the jobs of special constables without wages?

Mr. Patten: That is quite a good line, but it is totally facetious and fatuous. We need more special constables to join up as active citzens in uniform, to help to relieve the police—as they can do—for their mainstream duties, by carrying out many ancillary duties for them. That will allow better policing. That is why we propose to introduce special constables on the Underground soon. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Mr. Adley: In view of my hon. Friend's remarks, does he agree that the police are hugely overburdened with road traffic work and that it is about time that we considered establishing a highway patrol so that the police can concentrate on criminal matters?

Mr. Patten: It is the view of both my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and myself that issues of traffic patrolling are best left to the chief constables in each area, who are operationally in charge of those difficult responsibilities.

Mr. Corbett: Is it not deceiving the still rising number of victims of violence in the west midlands and everywhere else to pretend that community volunteers can stem the alarming increase in crimes of violence? Is it not merely an attempt to powder over the problem rather than put enough feet on the beat to prevent even more people becoming victims of violence?

Mr. Patten: More well-turned lines, but they are very wide of the target. The hon. Gentleman avoids the fact, which I made clear in my main answer, that we have formulated no proposals for community volunteers. The hon. Gentleman could not have been listening. Rather, we encourage more active citizens to join up as special

constables to help the police and the attack on violent crime by relieving the police of the burdens of some of their ancillary duties.

Stocken and Ashwell Prisons

2. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the arrangements for ensuring that men sent to Her Majesty's prisons Stocken and Ashwell are suitable for category C regimes.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Only prisoners in security category C are sent to Her Majesty's prisons Stocken and Ashwell. The prison service takes great care to ensure that all prisoners sent to those prisons are suitable for the conditions there.

Mr. Latham: Does my hon. Friend recall from our correspondence the very real concern of the Prison Officers Association that men are being sent to those prisons who are really suitable for category B? In view of the serious incident which occurred at Ashwell last August, will my hon. Friend ensure that the prison department listens closely to the views of the Prison Officers Association, which represents the people who are at the sharp end every day?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend deserves the congratulations of his constituents for the persistence with which he has acted to ensure that prisoners sent to the two prisons he mentioned are suitable for the conditions there. My hon. Friend will know that he and I are to meet shortly to discuss that particular issue and I hope that what I say then will reassure him.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister ensure that places are left available at category C prisons Stocken and Ashwell, ready for Monday's performance at the Royal Courts of Justice when the law-breaking Lords—led by Lord Donaldson, previous head of the national industrial relations court—decide to go on strike? Presumably the Home Secretary and the Attorney-General will band together to take appropriate action against the law-breakers, but will the culprits be sent to category C prisons or to somewhere even harsher?

Mr. Hogg: It is for the prison service to determine whether that security categorisation is right, but persons are sent to category C prisons only if they are not a threat to the public.

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend recently advised me in a written reply that of the 32,000 prisoners serving sentences of one year or more, 10 per cent.—3,000—of them are foreign nationals. Does my hon. Friend agree that if they were sent back to their own countries to serve those sentences it would make a great deal of difference to both Ashwell and Stocken and lessen the current problems in our gaols?

Mr. Hogg: That proposal goes somewhat wide of the question, though it is an interesting idea. The trouble is that if some of those offenders were sent back to their countries of origin they might not have to serve a period in custody.

Mr. Holt: So what?

Mr. Hogg: They would then not be punished for what they had done.

Mr. Sheerman: Is not this problem of categorisation in a local prison symptomatic of the problems in local prisons throughout the country? Such is the pressure on local prisons that categorisation and allocation is haphazard. Prison officers have certainly brought this problem to the attention of the Opposition. Many prisoners are allocated to entirely the wrong prisons, which bodes ill for the forthcoming summer months.

Mr. Hogg: As I have had cause to say before, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is not master of his material. Stocken and Ashwell are not local prisons, nor are they overcrowded or understaffed. In many respects, they are admirable prisons. I recommend that the hon. Gentleman should do a little homework before he next intervenes in questions about the prison service.

Charities

3. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to reform the law on charities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I announced in January last year that we intended to bring forward legislation to implement the proposals made by Sir Philip Woodfield in his efficiency scrutiny of the supervision of charities. I hope shortly to publish a White Paper setting out the Government's proposals.

Mr. MacKay: While I welcome the White Paper and hope that it will shortly be published—followed, one hopes, by legislation in the next Session of Parliament—will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary confirm that the Charity Commissioners can deregister charities found to be fraudulent and remove trustees? Is it not a pity that that does not happen more often?

Mr. Hurd: The commissioners have powers of the kind mentioned by my hon. Friend and are ably led and increasingly well organised. The trouble with the existing law is that it imposes on them a number of secondary duties which make it difficult for them to carry out effectively all the important tasks that they would wish.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Home Secretary aware that in the past 12 months many members of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have written to me complaining about the running of that organisation—for which we all have great respect? Following the expulsion of the watchdog group of RSPCA members, I convened a meeting and asked those members if they would be prepared to accept me as arbiter between the warring factions. Is the Home Secretary aware that they refused, and that many RSPCA members are making grave allegations against the organisation, about which something should be done? Will he ensure that any reform provides for an inquiry of some sort?

Mr. Hurd: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's reputation for calm and impartiality did not serve him on that occasion. It is surely for the RSPCA to sort the matter out. If the question of its charitable status should arise, it will be a matter between the RSPCA and the Charity Commission; certainly it is not my responsibility.

Mr. Favell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many bank accounts around the country contain money collected for worthwhile projects such as children's playgrounds, sports fields and conservation that have come to nothing? Often the promoters have left or died. Has my right hon. Friend any plans to release that money —which may run into millions of pounds—for other suitable, worthwhile charity projects?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Charity Commission is already able to take action if it knows of money having been abandoned in that way. For example, it can appoint new trustees. We propose, however, to strengthen its powers as a result of the Woodfield report. I will write to my hon. Friend with details.

Cocaine

4. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any new initiatives are planned to prevent the importation of cocaine from Colombia and other Latin American nations; what assessment he has made of the extent to which organised crime is involved in this traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Measures that the Government have taken against the production and importation of cocaine and other drugs include the provision of £1·8 million of drug-related assistance to Latin American countries over the past three years and the setting up of specialist Customs teams to target cocaine trafficking. Organised criminal gangs are often involved with this traffic.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I will be discussing the threat to Europe from cocaine at the ministerial meeting of the Pompidou Group in London next month.

Mr. Tredinnick: When, late last year, I attended an international conference in Washington which covered drug problems, Colombian representatives told me that they did not think that enough was being done in the United Kingdom and elsewhere to suppress demand. They stressed their own strenuous efforts to curtail supply, which had resulted in the deaths of their Minister of Justice and Attorney-General, more than 50 judges and more than 1,700 police and law enforcement officers in recent years. Does my hon. Friend recognise the efforts made by the Colombians?

Mr. Hogg: Yes, I do. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary had a meeting yesterday with the Colombian Foreign Minister. It was a very profitable and helpful exchange. My hon. Friend is right to raise the subject of cocaine. In 1988 the Customs seized larger quantities of cocaine than of heroin. We have a range of policies designed to deal with the problems of drug misuse and importation, which of course address the cocaine problem, but in view of the changing figures we are reassessing those policies to establish whether they need adjustment.

Mr. Skinner: When those officers are engaged in stopping the importation of cocaine from Colombia, will the Minister ask them to stop the importation of coal from Colombia at the same time?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that it is a drug, is it?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, it is. You have helped me, Mr. Speaker. The importation of Colombian coal mined by nine-year-old children is not just a drug but a drain on Britain's balance of payments.

Mr. Hogg: I think that the Leader of the Opposition will become increasingly alarmed at the fact that the sole Opposition spokesman on these important matters appears to be the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my hon. Friend appreciate the importance of intelligence-gathering in dealing with this odious trade? Are we doing enough to stamp it out by working with the authorities not just in Colombia but in Bolivia and Peru where the drug is produced?

Mr. Hogg: That is an extremely important point. The exchange of intelligence and information goes to the root of our ability, and that of European countries generally, to deal with the problem of cocaine importation. We are establishing ever better relations with the Latin American countries and are extending our network of drug liaison officers.

DNA Testing

5. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make an announcement concerning a Government DNA testing scheme to assist those seeking to settle in the United Kingdom.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Tim Renton): We are considering introducing a centrally run DNA scheme, the cost of which will not fall on the general taxpayer. The use of such a scheme would not, of course, be compulsory for settlement applicants. We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Madden: Why are the Government dragging their feet about the introduction of a DNA testing scheme? Is the Minister aware that there is a widespread suspicion that the Government are reluctant to introduce the scheme because DNA testing offers reliable evidence to prove the genuineness of applications from families who wish to be reunited in this country and that that is why the Government are wasting so much time? Over the past 12 months, the Minister has been saying that he hopes to make an announcement "shortly" and "as soon as possible", and last weekend, he said that it would be made within weeks. It is high time that the announcement was made and that families were able to take advantage of the scheme to be reunited in this country.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman is taking his usual blinkered and biased view about anything to do with immigration. In the past four months alone, the immigration and nationality department has accepted 750 DNA test reports showing whether the relationship is as claimed, but of the reports submitted to us some 12 per cent. have shown that the parents and children are not related as claimed. One in eight couples thus find that one of them is not the parent of the child although both had thought that they were. That produces many problems

—in relation to the admission of illegitimate children, for example—which must properly be considered before we take a final decision on the matter.

Mr. Gale: The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has shown his faith in the infallibility of DNA —a faith that I share. Given that faith, can my hon. Friend say when he intends to introduce DNA fingerprinting not only for immigration cases but for everyone convicted of crime?

Mr. Renton: As my hon. Friend knows, DNA fingerprinting has already been used successfully in homicide cases. The figures that I quoted to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) were intended to show that we are already accepting the test in immigration cases. We are now bending our minds as to how to introduce a centrally run scheme which will be fair to all applicants and will avoid erecting financial barriers which could be a deterrent to genuine applicants, without causing the general taxpayer to pay. That is a difficult problem, but we are setting about solving it.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister recognise the problem of people paying for DNA testing themselves whereby it has been shown that decisions to refuse entry taken by the Government in the past were clearly wrong? Should not those people be allowed immediate, priority admission to this country—even if they are now 18 if they should have been admitted in the original instance?

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman must consider the fact that when those children were under 18 they applied as dependants. That is the basis in our immigration rules on which children under 18 are normally allowed into this country. The hon. Gentleman must consider whether it is right that those who may already be married, heads of families, with many children living abroad should be introduced with their families into the United Kingdom simply because a DNA test shows that the father is related as claimed. That is the issue to which we must give close attention.

Mr. Watts: Is my hon. Friend aware that his answer deserved a rather more fulsome welcome than it received from the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden)? My hon. Friend is right to believe that such a scheme should be voluntary. If DNA testing became widely available on a voluntary basis at the earliest possible date to establish conclusively the blood relationships which need to be proved in the case of dependants seeking settlement, it would be welcomed by the ethnic minority communities in this country.

Mr. Renton: I accept fully what my hon. Friend has said. We accept DNA testing now when the results have been voluntarily produced, but the cost of producing them is a serious financial burden. That is why we are trying, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to arrive at a scheme that would avoid the burden falling on the ordinary taxpayer but would not financially harm individual families too greatly. We hope to do that and to announce the results as soon as possible.

Mr. Darling: As DNA testing has shown that many people were wrongly refused entry to this country, does the Minister accept that DNA testing could eliminate queues and paperwork and save vast amounts of money and that to impose high charges will simply erect a financial barrier in place of a bureaucratic barrier? The Minister says that the test may not be compulsory, but does he not accept that it may be necessary because of the haphazard and inefficient way in which entry clearance officers work? Will he not reconsider allowing entry to those dependants who are now over the age of 18? A manifest injustice has been done to them. The Minister should not seek to stand in the way of family unity—a cause that I should have expected the Conservative party to espouse.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Gentleman's attack on members of the immigration service was totally unjust, although I would not expect him, from his hideout in Edinburgh, to have great experience of immigration matters. DNA testing will not, as the hon. Gentleman put it, eliminate queues if the Labour party sticks to the policy to which it was committed in 1987 of repealing the immigration and nationality Acts. All the fair but firm immigration controls that we have introduced would disappear overnight.

Juvenile Offenders

6. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the subject of making it obligatory for parents to attend court alongside alleged juvenile offenders.

Mr. John Patten: In addition to the recent questions from my hon. Friend, in the past 12 months the Home Office has received about 40 letters stressing the need to involve parents in the consequences of their children's misbehaviour. Some referred to parents' attendance at court with their children.

Mr. Gill: On the very day when it is reported that three children, aged six, seven and nine, carried out a depraved sex attack on an elderly, disabled and defenceless woman, does my hon. Friend not agree that it is high time that society made it clear that it will hold parents entirely responsible for the actions of their children?

Mr. Patten: On the second point, I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that we need to make considerable and rapid strides forward by making parents more responsible for their children's criminal acts. On the first point, I cannot and should not comment on press reports, but I agree entirely with Superintendent Martin Burton—reported in *The Daily Telegraph*, so it must be true—who says:

> "Parents should be responsible for bringing up their children, teaching them to tell the truth, to respect other people's property and to look after those less fortunate. They should be told it is wrong to lie, cheat, steal and bully."

Mr. Bermingham: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell that to other Ministers. In view of his comments today, and more particularly his recent utterances on children and parents in court, does he agree that instead of seeking to punish parents for the acts of their children, whom the parents are sometimes not in a position to control, it might be better to investigate the root cause of juvenile crime and make efforts to provide help for those families which, at an early stage, have problems with their children?

Mr. Patten: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's serious interest in the issue. He is right that parents who, for a variety of reasons, cannot control their children, or who have sought help because of their children's unruly

behaviour, should not be punished by the law. However, it is right that we should follow the signposts provided by the Labour Government's Children and Young Persons Act 1969, which provides that parents can be bound over on a recognisance of £500 to ensure the proper conduct of their children. I look forward to new and imaginative thoughts on the issue in the forthcoming Labour party policy review, though heaven knows what they will be.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: As parents are already required to go to court in truancy cases, and as most children who are at risk indulge in criminal activities at the age of 14 or 15, will my hon. Friend reconsider the time limit? It can take up to two years to get the parent and the child to court. Will he also reconsider the penalties which can be imposed? Will he ensure that such cases are dealt with as quickly as possible as there is no point in taking children to court once they have left school?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The best form of justice is the swiftest form of justice, particularly when dealing with children. Such delays are undesirable and I shall bring them to the attention of my right hon. Friend who is responsible for these matters. In addition, I agree that the attendance of parents in court when their children are being tried is very desirable indeed, and I am sure that all of my hon. Friends would wish to see that happen on every such occasion.

Mr. Randall: How would the Minister's much publicised new proposal dealing with the failure to prevent child crime, to which he indirectly referred just now, distinguish between parents who turn a blind eye and those who genuinely cannot cope with the behaviour of their children? Does the Minister realise that his proposal is unworkable and, at best, would increase family breakdown and create even more homelessness? Is he aware that there are already enough powers to make parents accountable for the behaviour of their children? Why, therefore, does he not throw his proposals in the dustbin, where they belong?

Mr. Patten: I answer no to the hon. Gentleman's second and third questions. As to his first question, if he had bothered to read my words he would have seen that in the four or five-page document in which these ideas are presented the methods are very carefully set out. Should we proceed with such an offence, those parents who are not able to deal with their offending children can be separated from the deliberately delinquent parents and the deliberately delinquent children, about whom the Labour party has no ideas at all. If the hon. Gentleman's question is good evidence of the new thinking emerging from the Labour party's policy review, heaven help the Labour party.

Neighbourhood Watch

7. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes are now established in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of March 1989 there were 66,423 neighbourhood watch schemes in England and Wales, covering approximately 3¼ million households. This is a new record—28 per cent. more neighbourhood watches than a year ago.

Mr. Carrington: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that the neighbourhood watch schemes have led to a reduction in the number of burglaries, particularly in London, and that their proven success in reducing crime is the best way of increasing the number of schemes and of encouraging residents to join and to participate?

Mr. Patten: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that one of the best ways of accelerating the present happy decline in domestic burglary is to have more neighbourhood watches. Perhaps more district councils could follow the recent example of Brentwood district council, which has appointed its first neighbourhood watch co-ordinator. That could do a lot of good.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the Minister accept that, while Opposition Members support neighbourhood watch schemes, they believe that those schemes must be linked into a positive partnership between the police and local authorities, and that if we are to have proper crime prevention we need to give democratically elected authorities a lead role in crime prevention? Will the Minister and the Home Secretary give those authorities the resources and the powers to do that job constructively?

Mr. Patten: Many Labour-controlled local authorities —in Hull, for example—are very happy to co-operate with the Home Office in the efforts to reduce crime through crime prevention measures. I only wish that the hon. Gentleman would bother to go to a county like Cleveland and advise the Labour-controlled local authority to co-operate with the neighbourhood watch movement instead of attacking it.

Sir Bernard Braine: Is my hon. Friend aware that the success of a neighbourhood watch scheme stems directly from the relationship of the police constable on the beat with the people themselves? In my constituency—where, two years ago, there were 60 break-ins a year in one particular area—since there has been a neighbourhood watch scheme, with a first-class police officer in charge, and co-operation from the local people, we have had no break-ins?

Mr. Patten: I hope that if my right hon. Friend extends an invitation to me he will let me meet the police constable and the people involved in the neighbourhood watch scheme. It is not just neighbourhood watch schemes in areas like Castle Point—my right hon. Friend's constituency—that produce these remarkable results; similar results are being produced in the rather more difficult territories of Islington, Rochdale and many of our great northern cities, and they deserve the support of the Labour party. That is why the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) should go to Cleveland and give the Labour-controlled council there a good talking to.

Autocrime

8. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the action taken by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the insurance industry to reduce levels of car theft.

Mr. John Patten: The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the insurance industry have played an active part in the preparation of British standards for vehicle security and for anti-theft alarms. They have also taken steps to increase public awareness of the opportunities for preventing car theft and the insurance industry has established a central register of total loss claims. It is encouraging that, in 1988, theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicles and theft from motor vehicles fell by 6 per cent.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my hon. Friend for that complete reply. The 6 per cent. fall in crime will be welcomed by motorists throughout the country. Can my hon. Friend say what further measures might be taken to reduce crime? Does he think that if motor manufacturers improved the locking on vehicles, it would reduce crime?

Mr. Patten: We have some good new British standards on car security. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that motor manufacturers can do more. Some manufacturers such as the Rover group and Vauxhall are already doing a great deal. Also, the British insurance industry should strain every sinew to try to introduce new forms of discount to promote car security. It is through such measures that we will produce the admirable results we have seen in Warwickshire—to name a county at random—in the past year where car crime has fallen by about 4 per cent. and theft from cars has fallen by 25 per cent.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Is the Minister aware that some of the devices fitted to cars cause crime rather than prevent it? Is he aware that I have heard many complaints from people who have had a car noise device go off close to their home and who, having gone out to check that the car was not being stolen, have been extremely annoyed to find that it is not possible to turn the device off?

Such people often have their sleep or their day time greatly disturbed by those devices. What steps are being taken to ensure that the car noise devices turn themselves off after giving a proper warning?

Mr. Patten: If the car alarms have been properly fitted and conform to the excellent new British standards that we are trying to promote throughout Europe—thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport—the problems, which, as the hon. Gentleman said can be a considerable nuisance to local residents, can be obviated. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will Government Members please desist from holding private conversations?

Terrorism

9. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will next meet Ministers of other European countries to discuss international co-operation against terrorism.

Mr. Hurd: I shall be attending a meeting of Trevi Ministers under the Spanish presidency in Madrid on 12 May. I shall also be having bilateral talks with my French counterpart on 19 May when our discussions will include measures to counter terrorism.

Mr. Hunter: Bearing in mind that since 1979 in Great Britain alone, leaving aside the carnage in Northern Ireland, 323 people have died and 344 have been injured as a result of terrorist activity, only part of which relates to Northern Ireland and, bearing in mind that increasingly terrorism has an international dimension, will my right hon. Friend ensure that appropriate and adequate measures are being taken internationally to combat such crime? What has been achieved and what does he intend to achieve?

Mr. Hurd: Perhaps I can give three short examples of what we are achieving through the work of the Trevi Ministers. We are ensuring the flow of timely and accurate knowledge between forces of a type that enabled the French authorities to intercept the ship Eksund from Libya, which was loaded with guns and explosives and bound for Ireland. We are assessing the work of terrorist groups in Europe and the extent to which they are helped by states outside Europe and we are looking at the legislation in different countries and encouraging countries to adopt legislation such as that which this Parliament has just passed to deal with terrorist finances.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Can the Secretary of State tell us whether he has convinced any Ministers from other countries to join him in his campaign to combat terrorism?

Mr. Hurd: Yes. That is our common aim.

Mr. Allason: Given the disagreements that appear to have arisen between the various investigating agencies involved in the Lockerbie disaster, would my right hon. Friend recommend the inclusion of the United States in the kilowatt anti-terrorist European group? At present, it seems that the bilateral arrangements between the United Kingdom and the United States do not appear to be working very well.

Mr. Hurd: I advise my hon. Friend not to believe everything that he reads in the newspapers but to rely more extensively on what Parliament is told about the progress of the Lockerbie inquiry by the Lord Advocate, who is the Minister responsible.

As regards the United States, my hon. Friend is on to a fair point. He will be glad to know that the United States has regular and useful contacts at various levels with the Trevi group of European Ministers.

Mr. Ron Brown: Bearing in mind that no Scottish Law Officer is accountable to this House, will the Home Secretary ensure that his colleague Lord Fraser comes to this place, perhaps to a Committee room, to explain to interested hon. Members exactly what is going on regarding the Lockerbie atrocity? Will he do that, bearing in mind that clearly on the Opposition side of the House we believe in open government and in getting answers to very important, pertinent questions that have been raised on both this side of the Atlantic and on the other? Clearly, this has to be addressed and should not be simply a matter for debate in the press.

Mr. Hurd: I do not agree at all with the hon. Member. The Lord Advocate has a very high reputation in these matters and he has gone out of his way to keep Parliament informed.

Drug Traffickers

10. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total amount of assets confiscated from convicted drug traffickers in 1989; and what were the comparable figures for the first quarter of 1988.

Mr. John Patten: Our information is that the courts have made confiscation orders totalling more than £5 million since the relevant powers came into force on 12 January 1987. No precise valuation is made of assets frozen pending trial at any one time, but we believe that between £10 million and £12 million is at present subject to restraint and charging orders.

Mr. Couchman: I am slightly disappointed that my hon. Friend has not got more precise figures to offer on this innovative form of punishment for drug pedlars. Drug peddling is an international crime and much of the ill-gotten gains are laundered internationally. Can my hon. Friend say what agreements he has with other countries in terms of confiscation of funds held overseas?

Mr. Patten: Pretty good progress is being made, with some £5 million confiscated and between £10 million and £12 million frozen. We are making good progress with arrangements with other countries. Bilateral agreements have been signed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department with five countries, and letters of understanding with two others. We are now seeking to make arrangements with countries such as Jamaica and Nigeria, which will also be very important.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: What happens to these confiscated assets? Can I have an assurance that they will be handed over to the police forces concerned so that all these assets can be used in the fight against drugs?

Mr. Patten: The money, of course, goes to the Treasury in this country. Record allocations are being made to the police at the moment. These have gone up by some 52 per cent. since 1979, and the allocations take into account the severity of the drug problem in different parts of the country.

Prisoners

11. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison in the most recent count.

Mr. Hurd: At unlocking on Wednesday 12 April 49,274 prisoners were held in prison service establishments in England and Wales. A further 87 prisoners were held in police cells.

Mr. Knox: I welcome the fact that the figure is rather lower than it was, but does my right hon. Friend agree that there are far too many people in prison at the present time? Does he really think that it is necessary or desirable to lock up so many people?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend will be pleased to note that the total prison population is about 800 lower than it was 12 months ago, and that the remand population at the end of February was 1,200 lower than it was 12 months previously. We may be beginning to make some progress in the direction which I know my hon. Friend would like, which is towards having more severe sentences for those who are guilty of serious violent crime but finding disposals other than imprisonment for non-violent offenders.

Mr. Tom Clarke: What steps are the Government taking to reduce the unacceptably high numbers of mentally ill and mentally handicapped persons in prisons, many of them there because the courts can think of nowhere else to send them?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is right. Such people should not end up in prison simply because the other agencies cannot find a place for them. This is something which my colleagues and I are discussing with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Services.

Mr. William Powell: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, whether or not we have too many or too few people in prison, we simply do not have enough drug traffickers in prison? Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to make certain that continuing high priority is given to ensuring that drug traffickers are locked up, and locked up for long periods?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend.

Shoplifting

12. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many, and what percentage of people, who were charged with shoplifting offences and who pleaded not guilty, were acquitted during the last year for which records are available.

Mr. John Patten: Ten per cent. of those prosecuted for theft from shops in 1987 were acquitted. We do not have information centrally about pleas. There was, however, a welcome 12 per cent. fall in the number of cases in 1988.

Mr. Janner: Does the Minister recognise the vast danger of innocent shoppers being arrested for and, in many cases, charged with shoplifting offences? Does he know of the Tesco case, in which two women who established their innocence found themselves with a massive costs burden because of the payment-into-court system? Will he please discuss with the Attorney-General possible ways of remedying that vast danger and injustice?

Mr. Patten: I know of the hon. and learned Gentleman's longstanding interest in these matters. I am aware of the case to which he refers. If those who are caught allegedly thieving from shops can prove that they were simply absent-minded or confused, the case will fall. We must remember that there is no special category of shoplifting as a crime in this country. Theft is theft, wherever it occurs.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Campbell: Official figures show that the number of people in this country living below the poverty line increased by 55 per cent. in the past 10 years. Therefore, will the Prime Minister call for a commission of inquiry to find out how that happened?

The Prime Minister: The moment we alter the standard of what is called poverty and raise the threshold, obviously it is possible that more people will come in. We have a very good, comprehensive social security system. It contributes to the living standards of a large proportion of the population, and to nearly one sixth of the disposable income of the population as a whole. The £51 billion that we are now spending on social security benefits is more than the Government collect in income tax.

Mrs. Currie: Has my right hon. Friend heard the rumours about increased inward investment in this country, by international firms from Japan, for example? Does she agree that that has nothing whatever to do with Government subsidies or Socialist planning, but a great deal to do with a good work force, single-union deals, and an atmosphere of encouragement for business which only a Conservative Government can provide?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The inward investment record into this country is excellent. Other people have great confidence in the policies that are pursued by this Government, and confidence that they will continue to be pursued without controls in the future.

Q2. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Martin: May I ask the Prime Minister during her busy day to consider the plight of one of my young constituents, Mr. Robert McKee, aged seven, and that of his grandmother? Young Robert was born without any arms. When it rains or snows, his grandmother must hold him by the scruff of the neck in case he falls. He has been refused a bus pass and his grandfather is denied a companion's pass. On seven occasions he has been before a tribunal for a mobility allowance. If the right hon. Lady really cares about the poor and the disadvantaged, why does she make people go through such humiliating hurdles?

The Prime Minister: Of course one would be deeply concerned about any case such as that—*[Interruption.]* Of course one would, and every hon. Member would. I assume that the hon. Gentleman has taken the matter up with the appropriate authorities. As I said in reply to the last question, the taxpayer in this country pays about £51 billion towards social security, which is higher than the entire yield of income tax. That is the extent of our commitment.

Q3. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Steen: Will the Prime Minister spare a thought this afternoon for the frail and elderly living in private residential homes who can no longer make both ends meet because of the limit on the board and lodging allowance which the DHSS has set for 1988? While there must be limits on public expenditure, even for the elderly, may I ask my right hon. Friend to say something to ensure that those living in private residential homes will not be pushed out if there is not sufficient money forthcoming from the DHSS?

The Prime Minister: In accordance with the general uprating, we have reviewed many of the payments paid to those who live in residential care or in nursing homes, and I think that that is the group to whom my hon. Friend is referring. From Monday, we have provided extra help to nearly nine out of 10 people who claim income support to meet residential care or nursing home fees. We are now helping 150,000 people in such homes compared with 12,000 when we took office, and expenditure has risen from £10 million to £890 million. That is because the economy is successful, and it demonstrates—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it demonstrates also the extent of our commitment: £10 million when we took office and £890 million now.

Mr. Kinnock: Why is the Prime Minister continuing to lose the battle against inflation?

The Prime Minister: I notice, as the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in some very percipient replies upstairs, that the level of inflation—it was a miracle that the Labour Government ever achieved it—was a cause of concern for us.

Mr. Kinnock: Why is the rate of inflation in Britain twice the European average?

The Prime Minister: It is not on precisely the same basis —*[Interruption.]* I would add that the level of unemployment has fallen faster in this country than in all of the European main countries put together.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister explain why unemployment, by her reckoning, is still nearly one million higher than it was when she came to power and why, when the rate of inflation was at the average of Europe in 1979, it is twice the average now? Will she give an answer?

The Prime Minister: The rate of inflation in 1979, when the Labour Government left office, was a lot higher than it is now—*[Interruption.]* There are now more than 1·5 million more people of working age than there were in 1979. There are today more people in work in this country than ever before and we have a bigger proportion of our people in work than in almost any other country in the EEC.

Q4. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hayes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is outrageous that the French and Italian Governments should be spending vast sums of money every year directly in subsidising their own nationalised industries to

undercut British competition, which is costing this country jobs? Will she add her weight to the campaign to make Europe a place in which there is free and fair competition?

Mr. Tony Banks: So that we can all go down the pan.

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, state aid is incompatible with the concept of a common market, which is why we must get permission from the EEC in any case where it is given. If my hon. Friend has any particular cases in mind we shall of course take them up vigorously, because state aids may be phased out before we reach 1992 and they should already be the subject of permission. The Commission has recently said that it intends to make much more active use of its powers to scrutinise existing state aids in all member states, and it has our strong support in doing that.

Mr. Steel: When, in her next Cabinet reshuffle, the Prime Minister is looking for somewhere to send her right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), which is further away than Wales, will she consider Scotland—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes—where the policies and principles that he outlines will be more acceptable than the present ones?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman need worry—I should hardly be sending for him—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: In fact, Scotland and Wales are doing very well because of the economic policies of this Government. The right hon. Gentleman is aware that Scotland has the second highest average male earnings of the whole of the United Kingdom, thanks to the Conservative Government, and to private enterprise.

Mr. David Evans: Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the decision of the Union of European Football Associations to allow English clubs back into Europe in the 1991 season, subject to Government approval?—*[Interruption.]* Does she agree that the Football Association and the Football League would have had their application turned down had it not been for the Government's intention in the Football Spectators Bill, which will drag English football into the next century?

The Prime Minister: In so far as I heard my hon. Friend's question, I agree that the decision is welcome and I wish English football teams well when they return to Europe.

Mr. Grocott: Is the Prime Minister aware that when, in response to the vision and courage of Mr. Gorbachev, she continues to use the tired old language of the arms race, she is not speaking for the British people?

The Prime Minister: Nonsense. The British people are not as easily taken in as the hon. Gentleman. The British people noted that last weekend, for example, East German border guards shot at two people who wished to enter West Berlin, and they are noticing other things that are taking place in the Soviet Union. They know that we must keep our defences sure and that the nuclear deterrent has preserved peace for 40 years—and Conservatives think that peace is important.

Q5. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: While recognising that the Green Paper on the reform of legal services is a legitimate matter for discussion by judges, does my right hon. Friend share my relief that the judges' proposed discussion in work time of that paper on Monday is off?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I understand that the judges will hold their discussion on Saturday, 20 May, at a time when the Lord Chancellor will be able to address the meeting as he wishes. That decision is very welcome.

Q7. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fraser: If, during her busy day, the Prime Minister has time to go to the supermarket, how much would she pay for a large white and how would it compare with the price 10 years ago?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry, we do not buy large whites.

Mr. David Davis: Is my right hon. Friend aware that port employers employing 90 per cent. or more registered dock workers have given guarantees today against the casualisation of the docks and, accordingly, there is no need now for the dock labour scheme, which we intend to abolish, and there is no need for the dock workers to go on strike?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I understand that in a major statement issued today, the National Association of Port Employers gave a public guarantee that it will not return to casual employment systems after the repeal of the dock labour scheme in July. The guarantee was endorsed by employers representing over 93 per cent. of Britain's registerd dock workers. It stated:

"This unprecedented promise deals with the major fear voiced by the dockers since the Government made its announcement . . . The historical justification of the scheme was to end casual employment. Today's promise carries forward that principle. As such, there is obviously no case for inventing a substitute or revised form of the Scheme or equally calling a futile and unnecessary strike."

It went on to say that it would of course be prepared to enter into discussions in the coming weeks and months about the scheme and conditions of employment which would supersede the ending of the dock scheme.

Q8. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Janner: Did the Prime Minister see the sad and remarkable television programme by Esther Rantzen last week which revealed the disgraceful under-resourcing of hospitals and facilities for people who are mentally ill or mentally handicapped? Will she give some sign that the Government know and care about those people and that they propose to provide resources not merely to close

down mental hospitals, but to provide facilities for people outside which is better, but which cost much more?

The Prime Minister: With regard to those in hospital, as the hon. and learned Gentleman knows, expenditure has gone up on all hospital services from £8 billion in 1979 to £24 billion this year. With regard to the proposals for community care in the Griffiths report, the Government are considering those and will in due course make an announcement about their decisions.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John Wakeham): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 APRIL—Second Reading of the Dock Work Bill.

Motion relating to the Housing (Change of Landlord) Regulations.

Motions relating to the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study in Mathematics) and (Science) Orders.

TUESDAY 18 APRIL—Opposition Day (7th Allotted Day, 1st half). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Social Democratic party motion entitled "The Commercialisation of the National Health Service".

Motion to take note of EC documents on the single market. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at Seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 19 APRIL—Opposition Day (8th Allotted Day). Until about Seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Investing in the Future—The Next Decade". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "Care in the Community—The Next Decade". Both debates will arise on motions in the name of the Social and Liberal Democrats.

THURSDAY 20 APRIL—There will be a debate on private bill procedure on a motion for the Adjournment of the House. The report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill procedure (HC 625) will be relevant to the debate.

FRIDAY 21 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 24 APRIL—Progress on remaining stages of the Social Security Bill.

[Debate on Tuesday 18 April
Relevant European Community Documents
(a) 9756/88 Completing the internal market
(b) 10413/88 Information on technical standards and Regulations
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 15-vii (1988-89), para 2
(b) HC 15-ix (1988-89), para 2.]

Mr. Dobson: I thank the Leader of the House for his statement and in particular I thank him for including the report of the Committee looking into private Bill procedure and for providing time to debate that report next week.

When can we expect the promised debate in Government time on the future of the National Health Service? There was a rumour that that would be held over until some reputable body to do with the Health Service came up with an expression of support for the Government's proposals. Will the Leader of the House tell his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health that that is not going to happen and that we cannot wait much longer?

When are we likely to have the long-promised debate on the Government's proposals to substitute student loans for student grants? What progress is being made to bring forward the Bill to outlaw the buying and selling of human tissue? Has the Leader of the House made any progress in the discussions which he set in train with a view to establishing a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs or finding some other proposal which might prove acceptable to the House and in particular to Scottish Members?

Mr. Wakeham: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I agree that Thursday's debate on private Bill procedure is important. It is a complicated subject and I look forward to hearing the views of the House on the matter. The hon. Gentleman asked about the National Health Service. The hon. Gentleman will of course appreciate that it will be possible to raise Health Service matters in the debate on Tuesday—subject to your approval, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the general debate that I have promised, he shares with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health a desire to have that debate as soon as I can arrange it. Finding the time is causing the difficulty.

As I told the hon. Gentleman last week, there are consultations and discussions going on about student loans. The right time for a debate is after those have finished.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the sale of kidneys. Discussions are taking place through the usual channels about legislation on that matter. I am glad to say that there is considerable support in all parts of the House for the appropriate legislation, and we shortly expect to announce the introduction of a Government Bill.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have had discussions with two of his hon. Friends about Scottish affairs. I told them that I did not see an easy solution, although I thought that their contribution to the discussion was helpful. I am working on it to see whether I can come up with some satisfactory proposals.

Dr. Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): In view of the opinion of the House about human rights, can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the matter? Such a debate would reveal that the human rights issue is now international and not just confined to the Soviet Union or south American or to any specific part of the world. If we could have a debate on the subject—contrary to the views of *The Times*—we might be able to establish some sort of international control.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that my hon. Friend speaks for many hon. Members in wanting a debate on this subject. If I were able to arrange it in the short term I should look forward to hearing his contribution. However, I am sorry to say that he must be a little patient with me because I cannot find time immediately for such a debate. I recognise that human rights is an important subject.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Leader of the House will acknowledge that another year has elapsed since publication of the Griffiths report on care in the community, yet during that time the Government have miserably failed to come up with a response. Will he congratulate my party colleagues on initiating a debate next week on that subject which will give Ministers an opportunity to spell out the Government's position? Can the right hon. Gentleman clarify the precise status of the decision taken last night by the European Parliament for tighter controls on car exhaust emissions? When will the House get an opportunity to endorse that decision?

Mr. Wakeham: With regard to the first point about the Griffiths report, I welcome the choice of subject by the

[Mr. Wakeham]

hon. Gentleman's party and think that we shall have a useful debate. I do not think that I can say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security will be in a position during that debate to announce the final considerations of the Government. Nevertheless, we welcome the debate and will have to find another occasion on which to discuss matters further.

The hon. Gentleman asked about car emission standards. We shall, of course, carefully study the European Parliament's vote and decision yesterday, and in due course we shall study the Commission's revised proposals that we expect it to put to the Council of Ministers in June.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): In view of the implications for both East and West of recent developments in the Soviet Union and the stirrings that are now taking place in eastern Europe linked with new hopes about the awareness of human rights, when can we expect an early debate on foreign affairs?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise a general interest in this subject in all parts of the House, and the support by my right hon. Friend of the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Dr. Glyn) is an important addition. I wish that I could find time in the near future for such a debate. I shall look for the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Leader of the House state that hon. Members who act as consultants for port companies will not take part in the Committee on the Bill, and will not be allowed to vote in or take part in debates on the operation of the dock labour scheme?

Mr. Wakeham: Statements by me do not govern those matters. They are matters for the House and for my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Committee of Selection and his colleagues on the Committee. It is not for me to make statements on those matters.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): My right hon. Friend will be aware that earlier in the week the Attorney-General indicated that the object of the Green Papers produced by the Lord Chancellor was to generate as wide a debate as possible on the future of the legal profession. There has been an extensive debate in another place. The judges are apparently having a debate on Saturday. Everybody except the House has had a chance to debate the Green Papers. Will my right hon. Friend find an opportunity for a debate here before the end of the consultation period?

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot give my hon. Friend that promise. Had he been here at a late hour early in the week, he would have found that there was a debate in which the contributions were, if I may say so, of variable quality.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Can we have a statement next week on how the same sort of stories appeared in yesterday's papers saying that the Secretary of State for Wales was likely to be an earlier victim of a Cabinet reshuffle? Did those stories originate with Mr. Ingham? Is the Leader of the House aware that in any such statement next week the point will no doubt be made that it is undesirable for a civil servant, a close member of the Prime Minister's kitchen Cabinet, to have such influence in the country, bearing in mind his dishonourable conduct at the time of the Westland affair?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman uses Parliament to express his point of view. I do not complain about that, but he makes disgraceful and disagreeable remarks that are not based on substance. I do not think that they are worthy of a reply.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Further to the vote in the European Parliament on vehicle emission standards, does my right hon. Friend accept that it would be in the interests of car owners, environmental lobbyists and motor manufacturers alike for a definitive decision to be reached as soon as possible because of the probable expense for the car owner and the technology likely to be involved for the motor manufacturer? May we have an early indication of what the Government seek to achieve on the matter?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that it is an important matter and that there are alternative solutions to the problem. The announcement that I made, that the Government will study carefully the decision of the European Parliament and in due coure the Commission's revised proposals, is the most constructive way forward.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): I welcome the announcement that there is to be a debate on the report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure. Can the Leader of the House tell us why there has been a delay in giving the Government's response to that report? Is he aware that highly controversial Bills, such as the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, are going through the House at the moment? The objectors to that Bill are at a grave disadvantage compared to the promoters. Is he aware that the delay in implementing the Government's response to the report, which we hope will be favourable, means that we are continuing to cost the taxpayer hundreds of thousands of pounds?

Mr. Wakeham: I think that the hon. Lady recognises that the subject is considerably more complicated than the way she phrased her question would lead one to believe. Whether or not the Government can come to a clear view on all aspects of the report next Thursday, from many readings of the report it is clear that it would require a substantial amount of primary legislation to enact it. That clearly cannot be done at this stage in the Session. The right procedure is for the House to express its views next Thursday. I hope that the hon. Lady is called to express her view. I hope that hon. Members will use the occasion to debate the principles underlying these important matters rather than deal with particular cases. I hope to learn something from the views of all parts of the House. Then we shall decide how best to proceed.

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Baptiste), will my right hon. Friend reconsider his decision concerning a debate on the Green Papers on the legal profession? Last week in another place, a succession of dinosaurs were trundled through at the behest—we understand—of the Lord Chief Justice, giving a very unfortunate impression of the legal profession. Some of us who are more in touch with public opinion would like to put another point of view.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. I attended part of the debate and read it. Some of the analysis was not as accurate as it might be. A considerable number of noble Lords spoke in favour of the proposals. I believe that a majority of those who spoke and who are not lawyers were in favour of them. However, I shall still find it difficult to make time for a debate in the very near future.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When the judges go on strike on Monday—*[Interruption.]* If there are further developments, and if there is an unofficial strike, will the Home Secretary make a statement in the House? If that demonstration takes place in the Strand, will appropriate plans be made for a road block? If the leader of that gang, Lord Donaldson, ex-head of NIRC, finishes up in gaol, will the right hon. Gentleman make arrangements for the Official Solicitor to fetch him out? If people like me want to attend that spectacle, will passes be needed?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman raises a number of important issues, and I do not have at my fingertips all the details that he will need for his voyage of discovery. However, I can tell the House that a press release about that matter was issued this afternoon and that the judges council has decided to postpone the meeting to a Saturday. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will welcome that decision.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Did my right hon. Friend note the report in *The Scotsman* that the Opposition intend carrying out line-by-line trench warfare against the Bill now being considered in Committee room 12, to give Scottish parents the right to govern their own schools? As Opposition Members who are members of that Committee have already shown that they are more interested in time-wasting than in reasoned argument by, for example, filibustering an amendment that the Minister had already accepted, will my right hon. Friend consider introducing a timetable motion so that the will of Parliament, as expressed on Second Reading, will be carried out?

Mr. Wakeham: I find it hard to agree with my hon. Friend. I thought that any Opposition worth their salt would use reasoned argument in debate. I have not studied in detail what is going on in the Committee, but I shall be extremely surprised if the Opposition are devoting themselves to trench warfare and other ploys, which I am sure would be quite disreputable.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House find time next week or in the near future for a debate on the prison conditions and the circumstances surrounding the reference to the Court of Appeal of the Guildford Four? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is continuing concern about the health and condition of all four prisoners while awaiting discussions at the Court of Appeal? There is also considerable concern about a report in *The Guardian* last Monday of a dispute between the Home Office and Somerset and Avon constabulary about non-payment of money by the Home Office for that constabulary's inquiries, and the statement that it has refused to undertake any additional preparatory work in connection with the reference to the Court of Appeal until the constabulary has been paid for the last inquiries that it undertook. Does the Leader of the House agree that that matter is serious and warrants debate?

Mr. Wakeham: It is a serious matter, and I have grave doubts whether it would be right and proper to have a debate in the House at the present time. However, if the hon. Gentleman will write to me with more information, I shall ensure that he receives an answer.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Will the Leader of the House provide time for a debate on the provision of television licences at a concessionary rate to pensioners living alone, with their spouse, or with another pensioner? That is an important matter, because for some pensioners television is their only form of companionship, and for many of them it provides a window on the world.

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise that it is important to make that concession to some pensioners but I cannot see a way to find time for a debate at present. My hon. Friend might care to raise the matter on an Adjournment debate.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I shall bring the Leader of the House back to the debate on private Bills. It would be helpful if the Government's response to the report were made official because it is difficult for people who are considering promoting Bills to know when the procedure may change. Is he aware that by the time a public notice has been put out about the Bill until the time it is brought forward is about two years? It would be helpful if he could tell us whether he intends to accept the report in principle and whether he expects it to be implemented about this time next year.

Mr Wakeham: We held discussions through the usual channels and felt that it was right and proper to debate this on the Adjournment to enable everybody to put their point of view. The Government will give their initial considerations next Thursday. That is the best way to proceed.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm the leak in today's *Guardian* which says that the Government seem to have suffered a most welcome degree of repentance over their hard-line views on the Official Secrets Bill? Is it true, as the newspaper says, that the very amendments that the Government refused to accept in this House—strengthening the harm test—are to be introduced in another place? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we shall be given an opportunity to debate these important issues in the House.

Mr. Wakeham: I am certainly not in a position to state what amendments will be tabled in another place. My hon. Friend may already appreciate that if the amendments are accepted in another place, he will be able to debate them in this House in due course.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): When the Leader of the House was considering whether there should be debates on the numerous reports produced by the Procedure Committee, was the absence of time a consideration in his mind?

Mr. Wakeham: The absence of time is a consideration in every debate that I organise in the House. We had a debate on the outstanding Procedure Committee reports some time ago. It was not well attended but it was useful, nevertheless. We shall no doubt have to return to the subject again. Time is always a problem but getting the answer right is probably more important.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): When he answers a parliamentary question next week, will my right hon. Friend explain why the House can act as a legislative sausage machine all the time, but our best minds cannot solve the problems of how to prevent constituents standing in the rain when they wish to go round the Line of Route? Can we solve this problem as soon as possible?

Mr. Wakeham: There are difficulties, and some problems to which there are no easy solutions. However, I take my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Leader of the House tell us when we last had a Bill as controversial and unheralded as the Dock Work Bill, which the Government are steamrolling through the House in the shortest possible time? It is a controversial Bill and there is no question of it going through with co-operation from the Opposition. Is there a conspiracy between port employers and the Government to try to provoke a strike within the dock industry to cover up the domestic problems now confronting the Government—such as the local elections—and create a domestic equivalent of the Falklands war? Why will not the Leader of the House give us proper time to consider the proposals, reach a conclusion and have a proper debate, rather than merely put a legislative stamp on a piece of nasty conspiracy which is being carried out between them and the employers?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman's views are flavoured by the colour of his tie today. The Dock Work Bill has been introduced in proper time for consideration at appropriate intervals and will be dealt with in a correct and constitutional fashion.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will my right hon. Friend find time at an early date for a debate on the need to reform and tighten the law on trespass, particularly the problems connected with large gipsy convoys and illegal gipsy encampments?

Mr. Wakeham: I know that that causes concern in some constituencies, and I was asked about it by one of my hon. Friends last week. I cannot promise early legislation, but I will refer the matter to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I again ask the Leader of the House if he will make early arrangements for a debate on issues arising from the publication of the book "Satanic Verses"? Does he agree that Moslems living in Britain have a democratic right to have their deep sense of grievance and offence over the book's publication recorded by the House, and should not the general public have a democratic right to a debate in the House on how we can promote better understanding and respect in a multiracial, multi-faith Britain for all traditions, cultures and religions?

Mr. Wakeham: I have a deal of sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has said. Views expressed by the Government—and, indeed, by a number of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House—have shown the considerable concern aroused by those serious events. I do not, however, feel able to promise an early debate on the subject.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend is a democrat—with a small "d"—without parallel. On the subject of exhaust emissions in the European Community, as I understand it, this was the Commission's revised proposal. The Commission, of course, is not a democratic institution and has connived with the European Parliament—an institution of somewhat flawed democracy, as it is seen in this country—to produce this new solution. It has not been agreed by a British Minister—a British Minister who is responsible to the democratic control of this House. What can the House now do about it? Have we had it? Is it all over?

Mr. Wakeham: We cannot do anything about it in Business Questions, that is for sure. I think that my advice to the House was right: we must see the Commission's revised proposals, which we expect it to put to the Council of Ministers in June. We shall then be able to reach a view.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the Leader of the House recognise the concern of many hon. Members that the Government have again failed to announce that time will be made available for a debate on foreign affairs next week? Do they not provide insufficient time annually to discuss foreign affairs—at a time when important developments are taking place in, for instance, Namibia and South Africa—so that we must depend on Adjournment debates such as tonight's? Should not the Government provide more time for us to discuss their role of influence in such matters?

Mr. Wakeham: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's view. I do not suppose that I would take him with me if I said that we have a substantial amount of important legislation to get through, but dealing with these matters is always a question of balance.

I have corresponded with a number of right hon. and hon. Members about the foreign affairs debate. There is something that the House can do: perhaps some hon. Members could speak rather more briefly in the foreign affairs debates that we do arrange. I recognise, however, that that is not the sole problem, and I agree that it would be highly desirable to find a bit more time.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Notwithstanding this afternoon's announcement of the retreat of the judiciary, may I join the request from both sides of the House for a debate on the Green Paper proposals on law reform? Many of us believe that the judges behaved very insensitively, but the great majority of our constituents do not now place much credence in their views on the reforms.

Mr. Wakeham: One of the advantages of the postponement of the meeting from a Monday to a Saturday will be that the Lord Chancellor will be able to address the judges. That, I think, is a wise step.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): May I ask the Leader of the House in all seriousness whether, if the Government want to avoid a national dock strike, it would not be right for them to allow consultations with the union—which have not taken place so far—and for the House to debate the matter before Second Reading of the Bill? I believe that all concerned want to avoid a national dock strike——

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): We don't.

Mr. Loyden: I heard what the hon. Gentleman said. If there is no response, we are bound to take the view that the Government want a dock strike.

Mr. Wakeham: I am sure that all sensible hon. Members want to avoid a dock strike, but I cannot accept the proposition that a democratic House of Commons cannot discuss legislation introduced in it by a Government with a clear majority in a proper constitutional fashion.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware that as of today 272 hon. Members, including many Conservative Back-Benchers, have signed an early-day motion calling for the introduction of a dog registration scheme. My right hon. Friend will also be aware that on each day since the motion was tabled, 1,000 dogs have been put to death, which amounts to 100,000 dogs. I appreciate that it is not a matter of burning international importance, but it concerns many people. Will my right hon. Friend either find time for the House to debate the matter or, at the least, draw the significance of those figures to the attention of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment?

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. Friend is, of course, aware of early-day motion 348 and the strong views of hon. Members. Nevertheless, the Government have made it clear that they do not consider that a registration scheme would do anything to assist dog welfare or control. I regret that there are no plans to implement section 37.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I appreciate the fact that the Leader of the House has to allocate time to certain Bills and has to define priorities. However, he might have listened to the question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) during which the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) said that he would like to see a strike being called by the dockers. Why was priority given for the Bill on the dockers to be discussed next week, where there are more important items and Bills waiting to be discussed in the House, such as the Children Bill? Why do the Government delay such Bills just to get legislation they want on to the statute book?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is not being fair or reasonable. The arrangement of business in the House is done through the usual channels and there are discussions about the most convenient days for business. I have already announced the programme agreed and it is the best way to proceed.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): For many years, I have pestered my right hon. Friend for some action to bring to a satisfactory conclusion the future of the Settle to Carlisle railway line. May I take the opportunity formally to thank my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues for a historic decision, which has been universally acclaimed in the House and far beyond? Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the decision made by our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is historic? There has never before been a refusal of a closure of that nature. If it is a U-turn by the Government, it merely refutes those who say that the Government are always inflexible and never listen. In view of the rising environmental clamour, which we all understand and support, and which points to a happy future for the railways, will my right hon. Friend find an early opportunity to debate the investment criteria that the Treasury lays on British Rail?

Mr. Wakeham: Until the last sentence, I was going to say that that was a nice question from my hon. Friend. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for most of what he said and I shall convey his congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. I do not see myself able immediately to find time for a debate on the subject of the investment criteria for British Rail. However, it seems that there may be several occasions in the not too distant future on which the subject could be brought into the debate.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on the hypocrisy of the Opposition Front Bench? Is he aware that the Labour party has an industrial policy group, which is charged with the responsibility for evolving a policy opposed to privatisation without frightening off the voters? A leak of documents from that committee has been roundly condemned by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) as mischief-making and disloyalty. He has said that he will have strong words with the leaker at the national executive meeting or the industrial policy group meeting this afternoon. Can we assist him by offering the use of the special branch or the police to investigate? Is it not extraordinary that the Opposition are delighted to welcome leaks when information is leaked from the Government, but when their own information is leaked, they are all in favour of secrecy?

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that I can find time for a debate on that important subject during the coming week, but my hon. Friend makes his point in his own way and it will be noted.

Points of Order

4.5 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have heard that the Second Reading debate on the Dock Work Bill is to take place next Monday. Before the debate, I should be most grateful if you could advise the House about the position of hon. Members who stand to benefit if the Dock Work Bill is passed and the national dock labour scheme is abolished. Ought they to be allowed to vote at the end of the Second Reading debate? The Register of Members' Interests suggests that a number of right hon. and hon. Members have directorships or parliamentary consultancies that are connected with the docks. The abolition of the national dock labour scheme would directly benefit the interests that they serve in the House It is important that you should consider giving advice as to whether it is proper that such Members should vote on Second Reading.

During Business Questions there were exchanges, particularly involving my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), about the selection of members for the Standing Committee, if the Bill is given a Second Reading on Monday. The Leader of the House said that that is a matter for the Chair of the Committee of Selection. I am advised that the Chair of that Committee—who is up to his eyebrows in commercial interests, but I leave that on one side—cannot take into account Members' interests when he selects the members of Standing Committees. As the Chair of the Committee of Selection is not allowed to take such matters into account when selecting members of Standing Committees, it must therefore be a matter for you. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate that hon. Members who will directly benefit from the abolition of the national dock labour scheme should be selected to serve on the Standing Committee.

I ask you to look at the Register of Members' Interests. I have looked at it this afternoon and found that it is littered with the names of hon. Members who have a very direct interest in this matter. The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) was clearly heard by a number of Opposition Members to say a few minutes ago that he wants a national dock strike. It is interesting to note that the hon. Member for Tatton is a consultant to the National Association of Licensed Opencast Operators. Opencast operators will benefit if more profits are to be made in dockland by the abolition of the national dock labour scheme. Those are the interests that the hon. Member for Tatton serves.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I can deal with this matter. It has always been in order for hon. Members to vote on a matter of public policy. That is an established principle. It is not just the Chairman of the Committee of Selection but the Committee of Selection as a whole that decides who should be nominated to serve on the Committee.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I accept your ruling about the precedent for the selection of hon. Members, but I have a great deal of sympathy for the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). It is an important issue. As we know, the Transport and General Workers Union has a great deal of interest in the outcome of the Bill. If we were to consider the position of a few of my right hon. and hon. Friends, would it not also be in order to consider the position of a great many Opposition Members who are sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, not least the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: The same principle applies. It is a matter of public policy, and it has always been in order.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that you, like me, have always admired the skittish sense of humour of the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), exhibited once again this afternoon. In respect of the point that he made about my own interests, declared in the Register, it certainly would not be in the interests of opencast coal producers in this country to encourage imports of coal. Therefore, unlike the hon. Gentleman, I can hardly be said to be a slavish follower of my own pecuniary interests.

I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has said: it is appalling that Labour Members should seek to impugn the integrity of other hon. Members, in whatever part of the House, for outside interests that are properly declared. I hope that, in speaking about the various policies that we have to debate, we do so untrammelled by personal interests. For instance, I do not impugn the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) for accepting a roof over his head from the Transport and General Workers Union, nor the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), whose roof is provided by the same body. I certainly do not believe that, in their opposition to the Government's proposals for the docks, they are influenced in any way by the financial advantage that they gain from union sponsorship.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that we can profitably carry on this exchange.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Is it on the same point?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) has now said that he is happy to associate himself with the proposed dock strike that is being organised by the Prime Minister and her Front Bench. Everybody in the country —at least most people—recognises that it has all been set up. As the hon. Gentleman seems so keen to declare his association, as he does not deny my hon. Friend's comment that he relishes the idea of a dock strike, and as he is quite happy to talk about the declaration of interests, of which I have none, perhaps he would be happy to tell us how much money he gets from all his interests.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Two seconds ago you heard—indeed, we all heard—the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) refer in disparaging terms to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox). It used to be the custom of the House that, when one Member wished to say something disparaging about another, he gave that Member notice. I wonder if you can tell us whether that is still the convention and will you invite the hon. Gentleman to say whether, in this case, he did give notice to my hon. Friend?

Mr. Speaker: That is the convention, and in that connection may I say to the whole House that I hope that

all hon. Members will read the recent report of the Select Committee on Procedure on this matter and on the question of the conventions and of good order in the House. So far as the Bill is concerned, I trust that the debate on Monday will be carried on in the best parliamentary traditions.

Mr. Madden: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I gave general notice to the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) in early-day motion 702, which points out that the hon. Member, who is Chairman of the Committee of Selection, holds seven directorships and four parliamentary——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not in order now.

Orders of the Day

Road Traffic (Driver Licensing and Information Systems) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.14 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Peter Bottomley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Driver licensing is designed to improve safety and reduce casualties. May I quote "Another Voice":

"Others have lost sisters before. Every day people lose husbands, wives, parents, children and friends they have loved, whose loss reduces every perspective to dullness, misery and pain. In many cases they carry the pain around with them for the rest of their lives. At moments like this, one realises that under the surface of a polite society there is a great well of sadness and bereavement, an aspect of the human condition which is as inescapable as it is seldom remarked, yet looming larger in many people's lives than any of the things they pretend to think important. The only excuse for allowing my own howl of anguish to be heard is to give those as yet unbereaved a glimpse into the hellish blackness lying under the surface of their lives before they sensibly turn away and think of something else."

Those words, written by Auberon Waugh, come from the *Spectator* of 15 February 1986.

This Bill, introduced in another place at the beginning of December, makes provision for a number of improvements in road traffic law. It should again be widely welcomed as a sensible and largely uncontroversial piece of legislation. This debate will give the House a chance to discuss broader issues of transport policy. Some were highlighted during our consideration last Friday of the Parking Bill. We welcome each opportunity to publicise the Government's sensible policies for traffic management.

The Bill is in two main parts. I shall start with the reduction of road casualties which is relevant to two proposals in part I.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today announced provisional road casualty figures for 1988. These show a fall of 2 per cent. in deaths compared with 1987 and a 1 per cent. drop in serious injuries. To put that in a more historic context, since 1975 there has been an average reduction of deaths on our roads of 30 a week. With just over 5,000 people killed on our roads last year and over 63,000 seriously injured, that reduction is not enough.

Over 400 children under 14 were killed last year, with nearly 8,000 seriously injured. Of those aged between 15 and 59, more than 3,200 died and nearly 47,000 were seriously injured. Of those aged 60 and over, nearly 1,400 were killed and over 8,000 seriously injured.

Parents, relatives, neighbours, colleagues and friends shared the tragedy of over 68,000 loved ones lost through death on the roads or with lives wrecked by serious injury. Over a quarter of a million more people of all ages were slightly injured. More than 320,000 people suffered directly last year as a result of accidents on our roads.

In July 1987, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set the target of reducing road casualties by one third by the year 2000. Overall, deaths are now down 10 per cent. on the 1986 figure of 5,600 a year. That is encouraging when set against a 25 per cent. increase in

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traffic over the same period. Overall, for deaths and serious injuries, casualty rates have fallen by 20 per cent. but we still have a long way to go to meet the target in the year 2000.

Clause 6 deals with training for new motor cyclists. It will make a significant contribution. Motor cyclists are one of the most vulnerable groups of road users. Motor cyclists' casualty rates are the highest for any type of vehicle. Motorcycles and mopeds make up less than 2 per cent. of road traffic. A seventh of all deaths and a fifth of all serious injuries are to motor cyclists. In 1988 that meant that over 670 motor cyclists died and over 12,000 were seriously injured.

Lack of skill, lack of experience and inadequate defensive riding techniques are the reasons. I do not want to hide the fact that in many accidents involving motor cyclists another road vehicle is involved and the driver of that vehicle often was a contributory fault. In the past five years some 40 per cent. of all motor cyclist casualties were under 20 years of age. That means that over 100,000 families have been affected.

There is no requirement for motor cyclists to take any training at all. Learners can ride for two years on a provisional licence. If they wish to carry on riding, they must pass both parts of the motorcycle test. In practice, many riders take neither training nor tests. They simply give up riding after two years—or sooner, if they have a serious accident.

Clause 6 will make training of new motor cyclists compulsory by introducing new limitations on the condition of use of provisional motor cycle and moped licences. It will become illegal to ride on the road unless the motor cyclist has successfully completed the prescribed basic training course or is in the process of being trained.

This proposal has been widely welcomed by road safety organisations and the police, by motor cycle manufacturers and dealers, by training centres, individual motor cyclists and by motor cycling groups and their representative bodies. We are discussing the content of the new course with training groups. We shall introduce the new system as soon as possible.

Our road safety record may be the best in Europe but it is still not good enough. Accident rates are falling but not fast enough. This proposal will make one good contribution to the reduction of deaths and injuries on our roads.

Clause 2 deals with a different road safety issue. It provides that in future licences to drive any prescribed class of goods vehicle or fare-paying passenger-carrying vehicle will generally need to be renewed every five years once drivers pass 45 years of age. Drivers of more than 65 years of age will need to renew their licences annually. A medical report will be needed with each application for renewal. This change will ensure that drivers of large vehicles are subject to regular medical checks. It will reduce the risk of the driver of a lorry or a bus collapsing behind the wheel and endangering a great many lives.

The remainder of part I paves the way for a new unified driver licensing system in Great Britain.

At present, the familiar car licence is issued by the Secretary of State through the driver and vehicle licensing centre at Swansea. Licences to drive heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles are issued through independent traffic commissioners in 11 traffic area offices. One professional driver can therefore have two or even three separate licences and is answerable to two different licensing authorities—the Secretary of State and the traffic commissioners.

Professional drivers who go abroad can face problems. Authorities in other Economic Community countries are not used to the idea of dual licensing. Virtually all other member states use a single licence showing all driving entitlement.

The Bill provides for the United Kingdom to introduce a single licence showing all driving entitlement. The Secretary of State will become the sole licensing authority. All driving licences will be issued centrally from Swansea. Professional drivers who go abroad will have the benefit of an internationally recognised licence. All drivers will benefit from a more efficient streamlined licensing system, because the DVLC's lower costs will be reflected in the fees charged for all licences.

The introduction of the new licence will enable the United Kingdom to meet its commitments under the first Council directive on driver licensing. The Economic Community initiative to harmonise driver licensing systems was fully debated by the House on Tuesday night. As I explained then, this Bill does not compromise our position on the Commission's proposal for a second directive to complete harmonisation.

In particular, this Bill enables us to maintain our opposition to the proposal that drivers of minibuses and light goods vehicles should take two tests and meet higher medical standards. I repeat that we are distinguishing here between professional drivers of minibuses with fare-paying passengers and the non-professional drivers of minibuses whose passengers do not have to pay fares.

We shall continue to press the Commission strongly on this issue. The firm support which the House expressed for the position will be helpful. The Bill is drafted on the assumption that we shall win the arguments in Brussels. If we were unsuccessful in Brussels and had to adopt any of their proposals, we should need to come back to Parliament before we could implement further changes. I am not contemplating failure.

Part II of the Bill provides for the licensing and regulation information systems. These are systems which give drivers, through special in-vehicle equipment, route guidance and warnings on traffic conditions. The best known example of a driver information system is autoguide. Some hon. Members have had an introduction to autoguide through the demonstration scheme which the Department of Transport is now running in the Westminster area. I take this opportunity of inviting other hon. Members who would like to see the demonstration to let me know. We believe that autoguide and systems like it can do much to ease congestion and speed up traffic.

Road spending has increased substantially under this Government. Provision in this financial year for motorways and trunk roads is over £1·2 billion. New roads alone will never provide the complete answer to congestion.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): Can my hon. Friend tell the House now, or ensure that it is told in the winding-up speech, the answers to the following questions? First, in the explanatory memorandum at the beginning of the Bill, page iii, under the heading "Financial Effects of the Bill", in the second paragraph,

should not the reference be to clause 10 and not clause 9? Secondly, on the subject of clause 10(8), can my hon. Friend tell the House why the Government feel it necessary to regulate the charges that may be made by a licence holder to motorists for information from a driver information system? Does this not smack of Socialism? What is wrong with a free market operating in this area?

Mr. Bottomley: I am tempted to remind my hon. Friend of the various other Bills and Acts of Parliament which have gone through recently and which seem to me to do a bit more on regulating charging by various larger bodies which do not face an enormous amount of competition. But it may be better to take his invitation to answer his questions in winding up.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): On the second of the two points which my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) raised, am I right in thinking that it is planned that the Government will make a choice of which system is to operate, that it would be very difficult to have competing systems operating in this country and that therefore it is inevitable that there should be some kind of regulatory regime?

Mr. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right to say that it is not likely that two people will set up a pilot scheme in London, or a full scheme in some part of Derbyshire, for example, or on the Airedale route. I do not think that I am regarded as one of those who are most likely to want to regulate the price of these things. Perhaps it is a detailed point which, if not today, could be discussed in Committee. Perhaps we can reach a conclusion if the House gives the Bill a Second Reading today.

I was saying that new roads alone will never provide the complete answer to congestion. Scope for new roads in the middle of towns and cities—where congestion is worst—is strictly limited. New roads will not solve the problem of the lorry that overturns on the motorway and causes a 10-mile tailback.

Autoguide was conceived in the United Kingdom by the Government's transport and road research laboratory. TRRL has estimated that an autoguide system throughout London could help drivers to reduce their average journey times by about 10 per cent. and reduce mileage by about 6 per cent. The system has the potential to make even better use of existing roads and cut congestion. The success of autoguide will depend on co-operation between a number of different interests. The Government have been involved in the early development of the system and in promoting this legislation. Under clause 9, my right hon. Friend will be the licensing authority for autoguide and other driver information systems.

The future development and financing of autoguide will fall to the private sector. The success of the system depends on commercial development and marketing. It should therefore be promoted and financed by the private sector. My right hon. Friend has invited the private sector to make proposals for a large-scale autoguide pilot scheme in the London area. If the scheme were successful, the operator would have the right to upgrade it to a fully commercial system to which the public could subscribe. Proposals are due to be submitted to the Department by 21 April.

The autoguide pilot scheme will involve participation by local authority associations and the police. They will want to be sure that the system will not prejudice road safety or good traffic management. So will the Government. A special group is being set up, comprising representatives of local government, the police and the Department of Transport, to oversee the monitoring of the pilot scheme.

Autoguide involves collaboration with our European partners. There is already an Anglo-German draft standard covering an important part of the technology. Discussions with other member states are starting. An experimental autoguide-type system is already operating in West Berlin. Trade barriers within Europe are disappearing. In time, and with further successful collaboration, it may become possible to drive from London to Paris, Rome or Berlin, receiving route guidance all the way.

The fact that part II of the Bill is concerned with autoguide-type systems does not mean that we are pursuing advanced technology at the expense of other approaches. The Department of Transport is engaged in a number of initiatives to improve information to drivers. At the other end of the technology spectrum from autoguide, we are doing a major review of the statutory traffic signs regulations. We have designated 1989 the "year of the sign".

Part II of the Bill is necessary for two main purposes. An operator of autoguide—and possibly of other types of driver information system—will need powers to install roadside beacons and certain other apparatus. Much of the infrastructure will be installed by the existing public telecommunications operators—currently British Telecom and Mercury. Other parts will be installed by the operator of the system, using the new powers in clause 12.

Legislation is also necessary to ensure that the introduction of advanced driver information systems can be properly controlled. Clause 10 will enable my right hon. Friend to attach conditions to licences to operate driver information systems. A licence could, for example, provide that a particular system could direct traffic only on certain roads or classes of roads. The proposed autoguide pilot scheme will give us a good idea of what licence conditions are necessary for a commercial system.

Perhaps I could take this opportunity to spell out our policies for transport in London. It is our policy to improve the quality and capacity of rail and underground links into and around central London. It is our policy to secure more reliable bus services which are better matched to the needs of customers. It is our policy to make the best possible use of existing roads, through good traffic management, support for enforcement of parking controls and the use of advanced technology such as autoguide and like systems, now being extended to most of outer London, which give buses priority at traffic lights. It is our policy to provide through traffic with good alternative routes around London. It is our policy to build new roads to relieve the very worst congestion black spots and to provide for better orbital movement and better access to poorly served and developing areas.

It is equally important to state what are not our policies. It is not our policy to drive new motorways through London. It is not our policy to build any new roads unless they can be justified within the normal planning procedures which provide for consultation with local residents and others. It is not our policy to pander to those who wish to commute to central London by car in

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traffic jams when they could get to work more easily and safely by rail. It is not our policy to write a detailed master plan which would be out of date before the ink was dry.

The more vociferous commentators and pressure groups should take note of these policies. In particular, groups such as the Association of London Authorities should stop misleading people with visions of a new motorway box being cut through leafy suburbs. That is emphatically not our policy.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Government must be sensitive about that.

Mr. Bottomley: It is not just a question of being sensitive.

Mr. Prescott: They have to be sensitive on that one.

Mr. Bottomley: If the hon. Gentleman would listen with his ears rather than with his mouth, he might hear what I am saying. Radio stations such as LBC, which cannot distinguish between motorways and other roads, needs to listen clearly because its listeners are interested, and I suspect that many others in London are interested as well.

We can consider the details of the Bill in Committee. This is not a major piece of legislation. Its provisions will be of benefit to many road users. Drivers of lorries and coaches will be able to obtain their licences quicker and at lower cost, new motor cyclists will be properly trained and less likely to be killed or injured and all road users will benefit from less traffic congestion and fewer delays when systems such as autoguide are in use.

I hope that the House will agree that the Bill should be given a Second Reading.

4.31 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I thank the Minister for his explanation of the Bill's provisions. As he knows, I am quite new to this brief, though I am having to learn quickly this week. Indeed, such is the speed of political events, if not of the traffic around Westminster, I thought that I should have to ask for a statement this afternoon.

I am delighted to learn that the Department has today denied that it has ordered an inquiry into Sir Keith Bright's allegations about the London emergency services which so sullied the debate on the Fennell report yesterday. We believe that Sir Keith's allegations had more to do with his contract than with anything else, but I shall be writing to the Secretary of State about the matter.

As I said, I am new to this brief, but even as a lay person I had grasped what were the major transportation concerns and problems of this country, and certainly of London. In my naivety, when I saw that the Government were introducing a new piece of legislation, I thought it just had to be the Road Traffic (Integration of Transport Policy) Bill that we had all been waiting for. Might it, I asked, be the measure to set in motion the backlog of proposals necessary to bring some order to our transport chaos? But that was not to be. We are delivered instead of the Road Traffic (Tinkering with the Problem) Bill, not to mention the Road Traffic (Private Funding Solution) Bill.

None of the measures in the Bill is necessarily objectionable and, as the Minister pointed out, its provisions, by excluding non-commercial minibus drivers, protect our common position of opposition to regulation of the voluntary sector. Most of the measures are commendable, but we have grave reservations about aspects of part II. Together, however, the measures are unlikely to have more than a marginal effect on our transport problems, particularly in London, which will be the location of the pilot scheme for autoguide. I hope the Minister can give an assurance that, as parliamentary time is being made available to facilitate commercial transport schemes, it will be made equally available to provide for and resource public transport improvement.

The first part of the Bill is consequent on the EC directive on the Community driving licence and will centralise the issuing of drivers' licences, bringing all forms of licence entitlement together in one document. This part of the Bill also lays down more stringent requirements for the renewal of vocational licences. Drivers with those licences will have to seek renewal from the age of 45 every five years and from 65 annually, accompanied by mandatory medical checks. In general, we support this part of the Bill, although I have some questions for the Minister.

The Government estimate that savings of 100 jobs or £1 million per year will be made by centralising the process at Swansea. I questioned the Minister about that on Tuesday but as he failed to give a concrete answer, I shall ask him again. Will he take the opportunity to increase the number of staff at Swansea so that delays in obtaining licences are reduced?

My second question relates to the medical tests proposed for all holders of vocational licences. I am aware that many drivers already complain about the appeal system and I foresee apprehension among drivers about the new proposals. Perhaps in Committee the Minister will give us some comparisons about how such procedures are carried out in other European states. It is clear from the proposals that some drivers who undergo more rigorous medical tests may find that they are debarred from driving and thus lose their livelihood.

The Minister will remember that, in 1984, his Department's medical advisory committee recommended paying compensation to drivers who were prevented from working because they failed medical tests. What is the Minister's attitude to that? As he has not taken this opportunity to introduce compensation arrangements at the same time as imposing more severe requirements on drivers' ability to do their jobs, what does he plan to do? We shall return to this question in Committee if we fail to receive a satisfactory answer this afternoon.

I turn now to clause 6, which implements one of the Government's proposals on motor cycling as set out in their White Paper, "Motor Cycling Safety". As the Minister said, increasing motor cycle safety must be a top priority. Motor cycling has by far the worst accident risk, as the Minister outlined so clearly. However, many motor bike accidents result from other drivers paying insufficient attention to bike riders and there is clearly a need for car, bus and lorry drivers to be made more aware of road safety in relation to bikes.

One of the encouraging signs for us—and I am sure for the Minister—and one which we applaud is the way in which the motor bike organisations are now encouraging riders to take training courses. I hope that the Minister will consult the motor bike organisations thoroughly, because we politicians often disregard too easily the needs, problems and aspirations of young people. The fact that

those organisations opposed the introduction of crash helmets in the past and that they were clearly wrong to do so has meant that many of us have perhaps not given them enough credit for a more positive attitude today. I understand that the motor bike groups, as well as safety organisations, are readily supporting the Bill's compulsory training course to replace part I of the motor bike test. We are delighted that that is so and wholeheartedly give our support to the measure.

However, concern has been voiced by the organisations that are responsible for safety and for running the courses which the Government failed to meet in the debate in the other place. I take this opportunity to raise those concerns here, although, again, we shall doubtless return to them in Committee. First, there is concern about the number of training places available. In the other place an assurance was given that there are over 900 training centres. However, an informal survey shows that the centres are by no means evenly distributed throughout the country and there are gaps, especially in rural areas. In some places, therefore, aspiring drivers will be unable to take the course that would allow them a provisional licence. Does the Minister agree that the scheme should not come into effect until it has been ascertained that there is adequate national provision for the courses?

Secondly, I hope that the Minister will give the House an assurance also that the instructors on the courses will be of a sufficiently high standard. The instructors have an examiners' role, so they should be tested themselves. I understand that every training centre must be authorised by the Secretary of State and I suggest that a scheme similar to that for car examiners should be introduced, with every examiner having to be qualified. It is important at the outset of a scheme to ensure that the highest standards are obtained and that there is uniformity of testing throughout the country. Perhaps the Minister can tell us what arrangementss he is making for regular monitoring of the training centres.

Has the Minister any ideas about the likely level of charges? He has the power to set the maximum charge for the course. Perhaps he would like to comment on an unofficial suggestion that a course might cost up to £50. As he will realise, that is a lot of money for a young person, and the course lasts only one day. As no minimum figure is set, the cost is likely to be less in areas where there are more training centres according to the rules of supply and demand, but in rural centres the cost may be near the maximum permitted figure.

I am sure that many motor cyclists who read the reports of our debate will want to know what sort of figure the Minister has in mind. Clearly, it will be desirable for motor cyclists to continue training beyond this inevitably cursory one day. What steps is the Minister taking to encourage more people to take up advanced training courses? Will the Minister give us an idea of the likely time scale for the changes in the length of the provisional licence, the right to carry pillion passengers and the entitlement of car drivers to ride motor bikes?

We have some disagreement with the Government over autoguide. The Minister has explained to the House how autoguide operates and I do not propose to repeat his explanation. I acknowledge that autoguide could have some useful effects in helping drivers find a quick, less congested route to a given destination. It would doubtless be useful, as the Minister suggested, for longer journeys and for journeys throughout Europe. It would be especially valuable for diverting motorists from accidents on motorways, and it could therefore clearly contribute to preventing the motorway snarl-ups with which we are all so familiar. I am aware that the Transport and Road Research Laboratory in its original research suggested that autoguide could result in 500 fewer casualties a year and a saving of journey time of about 10 per cent.

Naturally, the Opposition, like the Minister, are in favour of such reductions. However, I suggest that it is impossible to judge the effects on casualty figures of one specific proposal in isolation. Ministers have not always favoured schemes because casualty figures would be reduced. I remind the House of the Government's attitude towards the GLC's low fares policy which was specifically designed to take people off the roads and put them on public transport to reduce accidents, which it did.

Where is the Minister's strategic plan for dealing with the chaos and congestion on our roads? We have heard nothing about that today. It is extraordinary that, of all the measures which the Minister might have brought to the House, he has prioritised this measure. As the impact of autoguide will be felt principally in London, at least in the first instance, I want to consider its likely effect here while accepting that it will be useful on long-distance journeys outside the capital city.

The scale of the traffic problem in London can scarcely be over-estimated. According to Government figures, about 160,000 people commute into London every day by car. About 3 million vehicles are registered in London and the home counties. People sit in traffic jams every day, get impatient and try to make progress by driving via residential roads and rat runs. They park illegally, thereby aggravating the problems and the dangers. In 1986, about 500 people were killed and 50,000 injured on London's roads. The emergency services are now severely affected by delays, sometimes with fatal results. In 1975, the average speed of an ambulance was 25 mph. Now it is little more than 11 mph.

Public transport in London has become less reliable and more overcrowded. The Minister talked about his hopes for improvement. I was delighted to hear that, and I look forward to those hopes being realised. Because of the difficulties with public transport, especially with buses, people are tempted to drive to work, and that leads to increased congestion. There is widespread agreement between the Government and the Opposition that urgent action is needed. A recent Confederation of British Industry report said that London was "strangling itself to death". That report draws special attention to the need to move quickly on repairing roads, on completion of road works and on cracking down on parking offenders. The difficulties caused by such matters could be eased by proposals that are already drafted and agreed by the relevant organisations and that are waiting in the queue for parliamentary time.

The Minister says that autoguide will help to ease London's traffic problems. I doubt it. There is even a danger that autoguide will encourage greater use of the car. That was denied in the other place, but will a measure designed to aid the motorist through London not encourage more people who might previously have decided to make the journey by public transport to attempt car journeys? The Minister must assure the House that, if it appears from the pilot project that more people will be interested in using their cars as a result of the autoguide, he will reconsider authorising its use. At the

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very least, autoguide will do nothing to discourage the use of the car and the Minister has said that there must be such discouragement.

I accept that, in their consultation documents, the Government have acknowledged the danger of encouraging the use of rat runs. I appreciate that the Secretary of State has the power to tailor licence applications to the needs of particular areas. We think that that safeguard is insufficient, especially given the lack of prior consultation and participation by local authorities. I shall return to that matter.

The Minister will be in something of a dilemma when he comes to license different routes. He will be under pressure to agree as many roads as possible. If only the main trunk roads are authorised, the usefulness of the scheme will be severely limited, but there are major problems in authorising the use of unclassified roads in London. The primary problem is safety, to which the Minister gives top priority.

Several organisations have already expressed concern about the safety aspect of autoguide. The Department of Transport document entitled "Transport In London" draws attention to the fact that about 48 per cent. of accidents here were among the most vulnerable road users —pedestrians, cyclists and motor cyclists. The majority of child pedestrian accidents occur within 400 m. of home. That means that they occur on residential roads. Any measure that increases the likely use of residential roads increases the possibility of accidents on those roads, even if accidents on trunk roads were to decline as a consequence.

A further danger may arise from the expectations of people who purchase autoguides. The motorist who buys it will do so in the expectation that he—I expect that the majority of purchasers will be men—will have a quicker journey. That will give rise to the danger of cars speeding down unsuitable roads and the drivers paying less attention to road safety than they would have done if they had not been directed to a specific road. There are ways to control the use of residential roads and the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety and local authority organisations have said that the involvement of the highway authority is absolutely crucial.

Our concern has been heightened by reports emanating from a recent consultation by GEC, which is a member of the RAC consortium, with London boroughs. I understand that the boroughs were told that autoguide would be commercially viable in London only if it included roads other than categories A and B and aimed at 20 per cent. of the traffic flow. Perhaps the Minister will tell us if that is an accurate assessment and just how many vehicles that would be.

In my constituency I am dealing with a strong residents' protest movement in Gellatly road where residents face the passage of 15,000 vehicles a day. It is a typical south London rat run. Lewisham council and I are desperately seeking a solution to the problem, but we see it immediately being exacerbated by autoguide. The Minister must tell us how he would view such a case.

The response of a local authority to a newly created rat run is likely to be environmental measures to slow down the traffic and restraints to limit it. What will happen when a local authority publishes a traffic order to that end and autoguide objects? Arguably autoguide could show traffic going back to the designated network, thus bringing the Department of Transport into the argument. How does the Minister propose to adjudicate in such cases when the Department is so wholeheartedly behind the autoguide proposals?

I give notice to the Minister that in Committee we shall seek to give the highway authority statutory involvement in the planning and monitoring of the system. Only in that way do we think that the needs of ordinary people can be protected from the development of more rat runs and more danger in their neighbourhoods and more difficulties in their homes. At least the rights of the authority should be guaranteed. The minimum should be the right of an authority to intervene if something goes wrong. We shall table an amendment to that effect. I hope that the Minister will take on board the concerns of local authorities in that respect.

I have explained in detail our misgivings about the autoguide system. We are aware, of course, that a similar project is being carried out in Berlin, but there is one crucial difference. That project is being carried out as part of a set of traffic management measures, financed predominantly by the public sector and integral to already existing traffic management schemes. That is not the case here. None the less, despite our misgivings, I assure the Minister that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and I will take the opportunity that he has offered us to see autoguide in operation for ourselves.

There are other measures in the pipeline that could have a real and lasting effect on London's transport problems. We welcome the publication of the White Paper, "The Road User and the Law", following the North report. I hope that legislation will be brought forward on that in due course. However, the Minister will be aware from the debates in the other place that there is a strong feeling on this side of the House that no more time should be wasted before bringing forward legislation on the Horne report.

New street works legislation becomes more vital every day as the level of building activity in London increases. New legislation is needed desperately to deal with the problems caused by holes in the road. Hon. Members will appreciate the irony of giving priority to the measure before us rather than to street works legislation. By providing the operator of a private information system with power to install apparatus in the highway, the Bill will add to the problems and complexities that the Horne recommendations are designed to tackle.

I have concentrated on our differences in approach and on the contentious points in the Bill. No doubt we will return to those in Committee. It will help the whole House if the Minister can give a further account of the Government's attitude when responding to the points that I have raised.

4.53 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I want to concern myself with one part of the Bill, clause 6. I think that everyone is in favour of training for young learner motor cyclists. I have had discussions recently with the Motor Cycle Association of Great Britain Ltd., so I think there are various points that it is important to raise at this stage. I begin by declaring an interest; I think that I am one of the few Members who ride a motor cycle

regularly—in the summer months, I hasten to say. I often use a motor cycle to go to and from the House during that period.

Motor cycles, especially big ones, are potentially very dangerous machines unless they are treated with the greatest respect and concentration. If one rides a motor cycle, one soon learns that there is very little between oneself and the road, and one remembers that an accident is nearly always more damaging to a rider of a motor cycle than to a driver of a car.

I well remember being in the Isle of Man, and riding with the marshals around the 37½ mile track between races, "sweeping up" after a great parade of the champions of the past. I came to Braddon bridge after one of those great heroes had spurted oil all over the track. I found myself arriving at the bridge at 50 miles an hour on my bottom, an extremely uncomfortable experience. I think that I was Chief Whip at the time, so that was probably the least that some hon. Members would have liked to happen to me.

We must always remember that riding a motor cycle is one of life's most exhilarating experiences. I hope that no misplaced zeal by any Government will reduce further the enormous pleasure that motor cycling brings. I applaud very much the Government's desire to encourage better training through clause 6. According to the explanations that we have had up to date, the provisions of clause 6 will lead to serious problems in rural areas. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) said that it has not been made clear how many training centres will be established. I have heard a similar figure to the one that she heard.

Let us say that there are to be 1,000 training centres around the country. I understand that that would be one for every 80 square miles. Even then, in many parts of the country there would be only one for every 150 square miles. I shall be surprised if many people in my constituency, for instance, do not live more than 20 miles from a training centre. That will cause a major problem for those who have to travel long distances to training centres from their homes or from wherever they purchased their motor cycles.

I am told that the courses may last between four and six hours. No doubt at certain times of the year it will not be possible always to fit in the course in one session. If there have to be two sessions to complete a course in a rural area, a considerable distance may have to be travelled within the triangle of place of purchase, training centre and home. Especially, there will be the problem of the person who fails to satisfy the examiner and who finds himself, perhaps fairly late at night, more than 20 miles from home, with no public transport available. What is he to do? It is a serious problem to which the Minister must address himself.

The Motor Cycle Association of Great Britain believes, as I do, that there is only one solution. There must be a special exemption for those who live, let us say, more than five miles from a training centre. There is a dispensation in the MOT test for cars when the previous MOT certificate is out of date. The Government will have to think about making a similar dispensation in respect of motor cyclists travelling directly, on a single occasion, within the three-cornered route that I described.

An amendment was made to clause 6 in another place to allow certain exemptions. That may be the means by which the Government will be able to meet my point. It is important that, during the Bill's passage, the Government make their intentions clear. They have already said that they understand the problems of islanders, and have promised to consult on that point. However, the Government must give specific answers. If that is not done, the situation will become impossible for many young people in rural areas, many of whom have low incomes.

A motor cycle provides the young man living in a rural area with the only reasonable method of getting around, but it could become an impracticable option—especially if the cost of the test is prohibitive. The hon. Member for Deptford was right to ask about that aspect. I heard that the cost might be nearer £25. Even so, that is a large sum of money for a young man living in a rural area who has already laid out money for his motor cycle.

I am very bothered by those aspects. I hope that the Government will grant exemptions of the kind that I have described. My hon. Friend the Minister might reflect on the fact that many young men in rural areas in particular learn to ride motor bikes at 10 or 12 years of age. My own sons could ride a motor bike around my farm like demons when they were aged about 10. Many young men in the country learn to ride off the roads and are perfectly competent. They have much greater opportunities to learn the basics of riding a motor cycle than do young people in the towns. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to respond sympathetically to the points that I have made.

5.1 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): The clauses dealing with the proposed unified driver licensing system are sensible enough. However, I note that there were two substantial debates in another place on amendments relating to eye testing of drivers. Substantial arguments were made for requiring regular eye checks for older drivers and for extra resources to be made available for research into how many road accidents are attributable to bad eyesight with a view to amending driver licensing legislation the next time around.

My belief, based on personal experience and on private anecdote, is that regular eye tests are an important factor in road safety in respect of older drivers. I am sorry that the Minister in another place was not more forthcoming. I hope that, before the Bill reaches the statute book, the Department will be able to say that more resources will be made available for research. I note also that we shall have to return to this subject in the comparatively near future, because of the European harmonisation programme and the regular system of consultation with our European partners. Several member states have more stringent eye tests in the granting of driving licences than we have. We shall inevitably be compelled to return to that aspect in 1991, if not before.

I welcome those provisions of the Bill that deal with the training of motor cyclists. I recognise, as do all right hon. and hon. Members, that motor cycling can be exceedingly dangerous and that a motor cyclist is 14 times more likely to be killed or seriously injured than the driver of a motor car. That was brought home to me when I was a duty Minister in Northern Ireland about nine years ago. One weekend, nine motor cyclists were killed on the roads of Northern Ireland. Had nine residents of Northern Ireland been killed in a terrorist attack, on Monday afternoon there would have been a statement in the House and everyone would have expressed concern. But because

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

those killed were just motor cyclists, no one bothered about them, and those deaths were barely reported this side of the Irish sea.

I welcome also the Bill's provisions for training. It is ludicrous that we have gone for so many years without making any requirement for training motor cyclists. However, I would not place too much store by this measure. About 45 years ago, in the Army, I was given excellent training by former TT riders. We learned to ride faster than otherwise we would have done, and very exhilarating it was. However, I am not sure that we became much safer riders.

The Bill's provisions will result in a cut in the number of casualties, but I attach more importance to the proposals, to which my hon. Friend the Minister has referred before, for limiting the engine size of motor cycles that young, inexperienced riders can use. My hon. Friend referred to limiting engine capacity to 400 cc for riders with only two years' experience. I hope that a measure will soon be introduced giving force to that recommendation. However, in that respect we are being held back by European consultations, because not all our EEC partners agree on that proposal, which has been around very much longer than our membership of the Community. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to confirm that action will be taken.

I welcome also the Government's proposals for autoguide, which is an exciting and important potential development. I notice that the Government say that the system will have to be linked to an urban traffic control centre and that the pilot scheme will take place in London. I hope that means that we shall soon have a proper urban traffic control centre in London, because one of the glaring deficiencies in London at the moment is the absence at the highest level of a London traffic management unit. I hope that the introduction of this autoguide pilot scheme will mean that we shall soon have a traffic management unit at a high level.

The great majority of drivers will certainly not have autoguide before the end of the century. I hope that more effort will be devoted to warning ordinary motorists about road works which may lie in their path. Earlier this afternoon, I drove up the M3 from a meeting in Southampton; warning signs about road works ahead were admirable in size and placing, and motorists were warned well in advance of any problems that lay ahead.

In London, in the course of last week, I wasted more than an hour in traffic jams that were caused by road works, for which absolutely no warning was given in time for motorists to take evasive action. I hope that the Department of Transport will take this matter seriously, because it affects traffic flow in London.

It would be churlish not to congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the fact that road traffic casualties have reached a record low for 34 years. I do not always agree with my hon. Friend on these issues, but he has done a great deal to raise the political visibility of this issue. The Bill is another small step towards improving road safety. I hope that, in the next Session, a much bigger Bill will be introduced to implement the sensible recommendations of the North report and the Government's White Paper.

5.12 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I welcome the Second Reading of the Bill, which contains some extremely valuable proposals. With regard to part I, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that the road freight industry is entirely in favour of the change to a unified system. Even if that had not been a requirement of the European Commission—a directive laid down for us to follow—we would have been wise to get rid of our present system and adopt the system proposed in the Bill. The present system is extremely confusing, and can be described as an anachronism. The new system will be an improvement for employers and drivers because it will make life simpler for them and improve their relationship.

We should consider a number of consequences which flow from the change. The licence system for heavy goods vehicles and public service vehicles will be brought into line. There is nothing in the Bill about how the provision for medicals will operate. As I understand it, that will be incorporated in regulations. It would be helpful if, when winding up, my hon. Friend the Minister said a word or two about the system of medicals, which is important for drivers.

The changes that implement the first European Community directive—the proposals in the Bill—can be related to the further draft directive debated in the House on Tuesday. During that debate, concern was rightly expressed about a requirement for a new threshold requiring drivers of minibuses used by voluntary groups to be tested, and for there to be a requirement to obtain a licence to drive public service vehicles.

The new draft directive also requires a change in the threshold from the present 7·5 metric tonnes to 3·5 tonnes for heavy goods vehicles. Identical concern has been expressed by those who operate smaller goods vehicles, and this is something we should consider when talking about the proposals that are incorporated in the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will take as vigorous a view on that point as he has said he will on many other matters in the second draft directive. If implemented, the change would double the number of drivers needing heavy vehicle tests and put an additional strain on resources. We must ask—as with so many other issues—whether that is justified in road safety terms. Is this merely a matter of harmonisation which in itself is good only if it achieves a valuable objective? The consequences of that change will be much more severe in Britain than in other Community member states.

All organisations—as I do—welcome the proposal for training motor cyclists. A report recently published by the Institute of Motorcycling entitled "Characteristics of Urban Motor Cycle Accidents" has just come to my notice. It draws some interesting conclusions.

My hon. Friend the Minister conceded that other road users were sometimes to blame for accidents. It is interesting to note, that on the basis of the 9,600 accidents in the Greater London area investigated by the researchers, 62 per cent. of accidents involving motor cycles, mopeds and scooters were primarily caused by other road user groups.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: That does not wash. It is about that proportion of accidents that involve another vehicle. It is incredible to believe that every one of the crashes and collisions is the fault of other vehicles. The plain truth is

that some vehicles do turn right without their drivers making the life-saving check in the mirror to see whether a motor cyclist is overtaking. At T-junctions drivers look left and right, do not notice a motor cycle and pull out in its path. However, that is only one part of it. It is easier to find examples—especially in urban areas—of motor cyclists taking action which does not allow other motorists a chance to escape unscathed. I think that what we need to deal with is mutual risk-taking. I hope that my hon Friend will forgive me, but he was saying something that has been said by a number of motor cyclists—a diminishing number, I hope.

Mr. Waller: My hon. Friend interrupted me before I was able to qualify what I was saying. I certainly maintain that a large proportion of accidents are caused primarily by other road users. Of course, by riding defensively motor cyclists can sometimes, perhaps often, avoid accidents that would otherwise be caused by the actions of other road users; an experienced rider will be able to anticipate those actions and thus escape disaster.

I urge my hon. Friend to read the report. The research was carefully carried out and shows that 35 per cent. of accidents were caused by motor cyclists themselves. The findings are based on statistics from the Metropolitan police, and I do not think that we should ignore the report's conclusion that, at the very least, a substantial proportion of accidents involving motor cyclists are attributable primarily to other road users. I hope that my hon. Friend will continue his Department's efforts to make those road users more aware of motor cyclists. At one time leaflets were included with car licences——

Mr. Bottomley: That is still being done.

Mr. Waller: I am glad that the practice continues. Because of the nature of their machines, motor cyclists are peculiarly vulnerable.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has listened to what motor cycle organisations have to say. That goes for the British Motorcyclists Federation and for the Motorcycle Action Group, which is not always kindly disposed to my hon. Friend: indeed, the way in which it has directed some of its diatribe at him has been very regrettable. I welcome my hon. Friend's willingness to consider again such matters as leg guards. His attitude contrasts with many motor cyclists' picture of a Department that is deaf to any representations that it may receive.

I share the concern of my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) about aspects of the training system. We need to be satisfied that training facilities will be adequate to meet demand, and also that arrangements will be made to ensure that training standards are high enough. All motor cyclists will of course be required to undergo and complete a training course, but I wonder what would happen if a trainee, having completed the course, nevertheless gave indications of unsuitability to ride safely on the roads. There seems to be no requirement for a test to be passed at that stage.

There is also the practical difficulty, referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, of the motor cyclist who needs to get to the training centre. Often suppliers of new machines will arrange for the machines to be delivered to the centre, which is a responsible approach, but many motor cycles are bought second hand and dealers may not be able to deliver them, especially if long distances are involved.

My right hon. Friend mentioned the MOT test exemption. If the keeper of a vehicle needs to get it to the testing centre, because in such circumstances he may not possess a tax disc, special provision is made. That demonstrates that a certain amount of flexibility has been used in the past to deal with practical difficulties. To deal with another such difficulty, it could perhaps be arranged for the trainer to meet the new possessor of a motor cycle somewhere other than the training centre and to accompany him to it. In any event, I hope that further thought will be given to the problem, which will no doubt apply to many new motor cyclists. Like my right hon. Friend, I do not wish to put any obstacle in the way of those who are keen to embark on motor cycling, as I share his enthusiasm.

Mr. Jopling: I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said, but I do not think that that last suggestion would work. If two young men wished to attend a training centre and each was more than 20 miles from it, for someone to collect them individually would involve a round trip of 40 miles. That really is not a runner, particularly late at night.

Mr. Waller: My right hon. Friend has a point, although I do not imagine that such a problem will arise in the case of all participants. A certain amount of flexibility would help the minority who may have a problem.

Autoguide is a welcome development. I think that it will be particularly helpful to motorists who are unfamiliar with an area, especially in overseas countries. I hope that it will be possible to obtain a measure of co-operation from other countries—perhaps through the European Community—to ensure compatibility and interchangeability of roadside and car equipment.

There is no doubt that autoguide is not a solution to the problems of congestion. Like many others, I believe that an expansion and acceleration of the road programme must be an important facet of our approach to the problem—which, as we know, costs the country many billions of pounds a year through the companies that operate within it. Nevertheless, autoguide can play its part. It is, of course, only one of many current developments; another is the digital radio system, which I am sure will be used in the next few years by many more drivers than have access to autoguide.

Autoguide, however, has the great benefit of being an automatic and interactive system. It does not necessarily require information to be fed into it, involving the intervention of individuals, as is required for announcements to be given out to motorists through the digital radio system. It is one way in which we can approach the solution of many problems which cost this country dear each year and it should, therefore, be pursued.

I regret the rather negative approach of the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) to autoguide. She is, of course, right to say that we have to pursue other solutions as well and I agree that autoguide is not the only answer. But that should not preclude us from seeking a system which has a great deal of novelty and value. The hon. Lady was concerned about rat runs. I understand that the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and the two consortia involved are very

[Mr. Waller]

much aware of that concern and are determined that they will not go in for rat runs as a way of enabling motorists to avoid congested areas. We should turn our faces against the idea that one should introduce rat runs through residential areas.

Ms. Ruddock: Can the hon. Gentleman explain to the House how it is possible to avoid creating rat runs in residential areas, as most people in London live in areas where there is a great deal of overcrowding already and autoguide will transfer many people from one road to another? In theory, at least, it is difficult to see how one would not create new rat runs by that procedure.

Mr. Waller: To the best of my knowledge, the consortia are determined that they will not adopt that approach. It is important that we should not allow the scheme to be strangled by red tape. Although we should be aware of the problems and difficulties, we should not allow a preoccupation with bureaucracy to prevent it from taking its place within a reasonable time scale.

The hon. Lady said that she regretted that we were not adopting an integrated transport system at this stage. To me, such a system involves direction rather than choice and that is the difference between the approaches of our two parties to transport. It is interesting to note that, although the Labour Government gave themselves powers to direct freight transport operators, they did not use those powers. Powers of direction are often quite impracticable, however much one may like to theorise about them. The Government are in favour of giving choice to the consumer of transport services. Nevertheless, it is the task of Government to provide the framework in which road transport is safer and more convenient, so that individuals can exercise their choice in a way that is more satisfactory to themselves. The Bill meets those criteria and I welcome it warmly.

5.32 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I was intrigued to hear my hon. Friend the Minister say that 1989 would be the year of the sign. He should be aware that motorists, especially angry motorists, are capable of more than one kind of sign and, in his experience and mine, many of them have been directed at the Minister for Roads and Traffic. It would be interesting to know just what the year of the sign will entail. If we are talking about driver information services, a great deal of anger is caused when the road-signing system appears to break down. It would be helpful to know about the programme that will be of benefit to motorists during the year of the sign.

I very much welcome the Bill and the constructive approach from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) and the Opposition. Despite the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) found the hon. Lady's approach rather negative, I thought that it was fairly positive. She brought to the Dispatch Box an element of charm, a weapon not often deployed by the principal Opposition spokesman on transport, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). I expect that she will be more successful than he is at persuading the House of the merits of the case.

However, when she talked about the autoguide system, she was on somewhat dubious ground, first weeping crocodile tears for the poor motorists caught in traffic jams every day. She then said that she hoped that autoguide would not be a means of attracting more motorists into the capital or other cities. But presumably the object of autoguide is to avoid congestion and to make life easier for motorists, in that they will not be so frustrated. The hon. Lady is trying to have it both ways. If autoguide works —and we hope it will—it will undoubtedly make life better for motorists and perhaps will attract more of them into cities. The hon. Lady must make up her mind whether she espouses the policy of discouraging motorists through congestion or the policy of helping them by making their lives easier.

Ms. Ruddock: The hon. Member will know that whenever there is an easing of congestion it attracts more motorists. If motorists perceive that autoguide will give them a smoother passage, they may exercise the choice about which hon. Members have spoken and instead of making the journey by public transport, which they may perceive to be slightly difficult, they may decide to make the journey by car because of autoguide. That point must be taken on board.

Mr. Moate: The hon. Lady is simply repeating the dilemma, but she has not solved the problem. Autoguide is designed to make life easier for motorists. She is either for or against. I choose to believe that she is in favour of it, judging by her fairly constructive remarks.

I went to see the autoguide experiment at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory. I went in a sceptic, but came out an enthusiast. I want to pay a compliment to the laboratory. It is not often that Government establishments are complimented on the work they do. The laboratory has produced a scheme that is admirable because it is technically advanced. The cost of applying autoguide even to the whole of Greater London seems to be relatively small in capital terms and the system could become available to motorists in a relatively short time scale. It is practical and economical and could contribute greatly to reducing traffic delays, journey times and costs. It is a welcome development and it is also an exportable system which will bring valuable benefits for this country. Equally, it is not a panacea and it is not meant to be. It is simply one method of easing the problems of motorists.

This country has not yet realised that congestion has nothing to do with party politics or the success or failure of past or present transport policies. This country has not taken on board the scale of congestion we shall face in years to come. If we look at the forecast growth in vehicle traffic on roads for the next few years, not just in the number of vehicles but in the extent of the usage of those vehicles, we ain't seen nothing yet. Our streets will become grossly more congested and none of us has yet come up with the method of tackling the problem, whether in London and our other cities or in our smaller towns. Some pretty painful nettles will have to be grasped in the years ahead. For the moment, we should welcome autoguide, as it will undoubtedly be of help, it will work and it could turn out to be most popular.

The next aspect of the Bill to which I shall turn is uncontentious, but of considerable importance to the motorist. This is not an insignificant or unimportant Bill. The driving licence, for example, carried in 31 million pockets, wallets and handbags, is precious to all motorists. If one tries to take it away from a motorist, one realises

how precious it is to him. The format of that driving licence is almost as important and delicate a matter as the format of the passport, which is another contentious matter. Like many others, I deeply regret the passing of our old driving licence, that rather nice, maroon, stiff-covered document that could be tucked away and did not become too tatty. It was replaced by a rather tatty green bit of paper in an awkward plastic container. I believe that the newest licences are pink, but mine is green. They are tatty, bureaucratic pieces of paper.

I welcome in principle a unified licence and a common format for Europe and for the whole world. However, the international driving licence never caught on. A unified driving licence would have great advantages, but I plead for a return to a decent format. We should persuade Europe to adopt a driving licence that drivers would be proud to carry rather than these poor, tatty pieces of paper. Alas, if one has to produce them too often or if one has to have them endorsed too often they soon become very tatty indeed.

On the question of a common format and a unified licence, I understand that it is difficult to endorse the licence of foreign drivers. It is vital, therefore, in the interests of justice, fairness and of the irate victims of foreign drivers that there should be powers to deal promptly with foreign drivers, including the confiscation of their licence, if necessary. I hope that the Minister will say what powers the courts will have to take stringent action against foreign motorists and the drivers of heavy goods vehicles from the continent who infringe our laws and are involved in accidents. Our powers to deal with them are limited.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) referred to eye tests. The Bill provides for more stringent medical tests for the drivers of heavy goods vehicles and passenger service vehicles. However, I am not clear about how much more stringent the tests will be. That should be spelt out, either now or in Committee. Millions of people need a driving licence for their job. I hope that the Minister will tell us whether the requirement that drivers of heavy goods vehicles must have a medical test is to be extended to the drivers of smaller, lighter vehicles—3·5 tonnes as against 7·5 tonnes. How many more people will be affected by the new requirement? If they are to be required to have regular medical checks, that is an important matter for them. We ought to be told about the scale of a change of that significance.

Mr. Waller: In case there is any doubt about the matter, I can assure my hon. Friend that the proposed change will take place only if the second draft directive of the European Commission is implemented. However, there would be a knock-on effect if it were to be implemented in that form. It would have an effect on the medical examinations that are provided for in the Bill.

Mr. Moate: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has made an important point. A number of draft directives affect our licensing procedures. We are entitled to know what chance we have of persuading the European Community to adopt our point of view about minibus and heavy goods vehicle licences and other matters. If we are not successful in persuading the Community, what powers do we have to resist the directives? If we have no power to resist, is it inevitable that these changes will be made? They are not necessarily bad and they are not necessarily wrong, but the implications for British drivers ought to be spelt out.

I do not believe that regular medical tests or eye tests are against the interests of the motorist. They are designed not to hinder but to help him. If the driver of a heavy goods vehicle has regular eye tests, the intention is not to push him off the road but to ensure that he wears glasses, if he needs to do so, or has adjustments made to his glasses. The tests are designed to help drivers to stay on the road without causing accidents.

The Minister knows that I have strongly urged the introduction of regular eye tests for motorists. I should like such a provision to be included in the Bill. However, the Minister and his Department have been somewhat sceptical about eye tests. Their case is that there is no evidence that a significant number of accidents have been caused by poor eyesight. However, one knows from experience that that is wrong. Police forces have carried out eye tests. They believe that bad eyesight causes accidents. A strong case has been made out for regular sight tests.

I am delighted that a few days ago Swinton Insurance —one of the largest motor insurance brokers in the country that arranges insurance for about 1 million motorists—announced that it had issued a notice to all its motorists saying that they ought to have regular eye tests, otherwise they would be in danger of invalidating their insurance.

Stringent Government action would not be needed and it would not involve them in any expense. All that the Government need to do is to encourage the British Insurance Brokers Association to tell all motorists that they are in danger of invalidating their insurance policies if they do not have frequent medical and eye tests. That would help the Minister in the tremendous campaign that he has waged so consistently over the years to reduce the number of accidents on the roads.

While I have been a Member of Parliament I have spoken in debates on various transport Bills. Each time we have referred to new tests for motor cyclists. However, we have not achieved the desired objective. There is to be another requirement. I hope that it will work. I have been visited by groups of motor cyclists in my constituency. We have disagreed from time to time about crash helmets and other related matters, but generally speaking they have adoped a responsible attitude and have been very responsive. I hope that if new tests are to be introduced we can give to motor cyclists the message that training facilities will be made available for them. It would be frustrating to impose restrictions that caused long delays and made it difficult for new motor cyclists to obtain a licence.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) was a member of the Cabinet when these groups of people came to see me. That helped me greatly. They thought that Conservatives do not like motor cycles and never ride them, but I was able to tell them that the Minister of Agriculture rode a motor cycle. That was a very persuasive argument. Unfortunately, I do not agree with my right hon. Friend that it is an exhilarating experience. I tried it only once. I thought that I was using the brake, but it turned out to be the throttle and I ended up in a rose bush. It was all very painful. Four wheels are very much safer than two. However, I accept that many people gain much satisfaction from riding

[Mr. Moate]

motor cycles. If we are to introduce regulations that affect motor cyclists, we must ensure that improved training facilities are provided for them.

My hon. Friend the Minister wandered slightly away from the provisions of the Bill. Perhaps I may do so also. He referred to his general policy for transport in London. We have talked a great deal about congestion. Much emphasis has been placed on the rail study. The Government assume that that is the last word to be said about new railway services in London. I do not believe in an integrated transport system. It never works. We shall make a serious mistake if we believe that these rail proposals are the last word.

One part of London directly affects my constituency in Kent, but there are no Underground services in south-east London. The rail study said virtually nothing about easing the congestion on the roads and on British Rail by providing new Underground services to that part of our capital city. It deliberately ignored that matter and argued that its brief and remit did not extend to trying to relieve congestion on the roads, that it was simply a matter of trying to ease the existing congestion on the central railway line. I hope that my hon. Friend will very soon tell us a little more about what studies the Government intend to launch into the question of extending the Underground rail system to other parts of London to reduce some of the congestion, which is massive at present but will increase in intensity in years to come.

With those remarks, I welcome the Bill very much. I am glad that it appears to have the support of all parts of the House.

5.50 pm

Ms. Ruddock: By leave of the House, I would like to respond to a number of points that have come up in this debate and to reiterate briefly some of those that I made earlier.

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) talked very effectively about the difficulties in rural areas. Like him, we are particularly concerned about the provision of training centres. It is very clear that young people in these areas need motor cycles. We all know that there is often a lack of public transport suitable for getting a younger person, for example, to a first job, so a motor bike becomes essential to that young person's future. I think the hon. Member referred only to young men. These days, many young women too want to use that cheaper form of transport to help them have a reasonable life in rural areas. I reiterate that the Minister should not begin this scheme unless he can assure us that there will be sufficient centres and that everyone, no matter where he or she lives, will have a choice as to mode of transportation, where that is not in direct conflict—as, in this case, it certainly is not—with community interests as a whole.

It is particularly important that the training proposals be supported. As I said earlier, Opposition Members are very much in favour of mandatory training for motor bike users. However, I am sympathetic to the points that were raised by the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and by the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) about how a young person might be enabled to take the test on his own machine. That is desirable, but within the provision at the moment it would seem to be very difficult. I hope the Minister will be able to help us on that point.

The question of eye tests and the possibility that they will become more stringent was raised. By introducing charges for eyesight tests, the Government have created a particular disincentive to people doing the best for their own eyesight, and we are very fearful that more stringent, difficult and lengthy tests would attract even higher fees.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) expressed regret about the lack of an urban traffic control centre. I reiterate that what this capital city needs is a strategic planning authoritiy. Nothing will deal with the present chaos unless we can plan strategically and take account of all possible modes of transportation and all possible solutions to the problems that we encounter.

The question of roadworks and the difficulties that people have in circumventing them was raised. That is bound to bring to the Minister's attention just what will be the nature of the roadworks involved in the provision of the autoguide scheme itself. They might be considerable, but we ought to know. Let me reiterate what we are in favour of. We are very much in favour of the harmonisation of the licensing scheme; we are very much in favour of better training for motor bike users; and, of course, we support the Minister in everything he does to bring forward measures to improve road safety. Equally, we reserve our right to be critical of measures which come in isolation—autoguide is an example—when other methods and other measures might produce even better results.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) appeared to support our case that, because of the potential immense growth in car ownership and usage, we can solve these problems only by greater and better provision of public transport.

As I said at the outset, we believe that, while autoguide may be very useful in other parts of Britain, there is no justification for piloting it in London as though it might provide a real solution to London's transportation chaos. I suspect that the results will be marginal. I have yet to encounter in London a road that does not have a lot of traffic, and I believe that the possible problems and risks are very considerable. I know that my consituents in south London will be extremely concerned at the possible creation of rat runs—a question which I believe has not been dealt with adequately in this debate, though I have great hopes for the Minister's response, which is about to come. Perhaps he will tell us specifically whether autoguide routes can be restricted to A and B roads. If so, he will put a somewhat different complexion on these proposals and on the information that I gave him, which I believe came from a meeting involving GEC—a member of one of the consortia—which stated categorically that it would not be profitable if only A and B routes in London could be used.

5.56 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley: By leave of the House, I thank all Members who have taken part in this debate. Their contributions may make matters easier. It may make it easier to prepare for the Committee stage to have some of the detailed points available and ready. I shall do what I can now to answer many of them.

I am rather surprised that there are no Liberal or SDP Members here. We seem to be missing some of the

nationalists also. I am grateful that we are back to two-party politics. It has always struck me that liberals like myself ought to be dominating each of the major parties——

Mr. Greg Knight: On that point, is it not a fact that there is a good case for making the pilot autoscheme available, free of charge, to Liberals and Democrats so that they might on occasions find their way to this Chamber?

Mr. Bottomley: It is true, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, probably recall, that on Tuesday we were talking about how they could all fit into a minibus. It looks as though they did not have the autoguide system to bring them into the Chamber at the right time.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) did well to ignore totally the beguiling talk of my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). It is not a lack of charm but intemperance that we have noticed in her hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). His storming into the Chamber just after 11 o'clock last night to tell the House what it should or should not be doing, based on a badly sub-edited report from the Press Association, destroyed much of what had been a fairly important debate. The more often that the hon. Lady is allowed to take these debates for the Opposition, the better we will move forward. It may be that her hon. Friend will be promoted back to the Department of Energy fairly shortly.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): No, no.

Mr. Bottomley: I welcome my hon. Friend's comment.

I want to turn to some points that have been made in the debate. An important point concerned other Bills that could come before this House in the future. The Horne report will be moving towards legislation and we fully accept the case. Obviously it is not possible to give a commitment to a date of introduction, but the time has not been wasted. The utilities, the statutory undertakers, the highway authorities and the Department of Transport have been doing essential development work on fleshing out the Horne report, and agreement has been reached on contentious issues. That means that when the legislation comes before the House it should be possible to consider it in detail without too much dissension. It is important to recognise that the Horne report and the replacement of the public utilities and streets works legislation should lead to cost reductions both for the statutory undertakers and utilities and for the highway authorities, and should lead to a better deal for those who pay the charges of the utilities, those who fund the local highway authorities, and should provide better movement through the streets for bus passengers, car drivers and, for that matter, pedestrians on the pavement.

There has been a reference to the North committee. The response to the North committee report was published recently. It shows the Government's commitment to improving the contribution that the law can make to road casualty reduction. Legislation will be brought forward when parliamentary time can be found for the major package of reforms. There are some details outside the North committee report on which the Home Office is still expecting responses to its consultations about some police powers.

We need to recognise that it is not legislation that has brought about the dramatic reduction in road casualties in this country. Legislation can contribute but the major change has been a new culture on the roads in which people expect co-operation, care and courtesy and in which people recognise that we all make mistakes and that room must be made for the mistakes of others.

My hon. Friends who have spoken on behalf of motor cyclists rightly said that they are more vulnerable than others, are involved in crashes more often and that the consequences of each crash are worse for them. We should all try to remember that pedestrians and motor cyclists are human beings. Because we are in a one tonne steel vest —a motor car—whether we are commuting or using it as a sales representative or an engineer, we must not forget that we share the responsibility for those more vulnerable than ourselves.

The hon. Member for Deptford asked about the time scale for some of the other measures mentioned in the motor cycle safety package. We hope to announce decisions shortly on some of the other elements. We have done the best we can to bear in mind the views and responses we have received. The Motorcycle Action Group has done a great deal to promote defensive riding techniques and it concentrates on important issues. However, I am not sure that it is necessary for the group to advertise a

> "Loadsatrouble (Riders' Rights Day) T-shirt—as worn by your Transport Minister! Still available. Black on Grey only. £4·99 plus 30p postage and packing."

It is available from PO Box 750, Birmingham, B30 3BA.

The serious point made by *Mag News* on defensive riding techniques is that the road user, who is often at fault —not always—usually manages to pick on an inexperienced motor cyclist with whom to tangle. The ratio of risk for motor cyclists up to the age of 20 used to be 20 times as great as for motor cyclists aged 25-plus—that describes my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)—and it is now a ratio of 13:1. Therefore, there has been an improvement in safety for the younger motor cyclist. That is important, but the risk is still too great and must be reduced.

I can give an illustration of the importance of training. Research shows that three quarters of motor cyclists do not use their front brake for straight line braking. That is perhaps the biggest single mistake we are making and it shows that the training has not been adopted into the habits and practices of motor cyclists. It also demonstrates the importance of initial basic training so that we do not simply rely on someone's experience as a cyclist. We need them to understand that motorised two-wheel movement —mopeds and motor cycles—is different. It is important to keep what is good about motor cycling rather than to accept that it should be eliminated. No one wants that to happen. I would be happy to see much more motor cycling —there used to be more in the past—as long as the casualty rate keeps coming down. That is the real test for motor cycling.

The hon. Member for Deptford asked about the motor cycle training course fee. It is important to realise that we are not necessarily talking about compulsory basic training as a one-day course or any other fixed format. We want to ensure that people become competent as soon as possible. Some may be able to do that in a day but others may take longer and some may want to train in a collection of hours put together. However, that is not for us to dictate

[Mr. Bottomley]

immediately. There may be a range of provisions. We do not have a preconceived idea of what the course fee is likely to be. We hope that it will not be necessary to fix a fee. The powers given by clause 6 are to safeguard the position of trainees so that they will not be faced with exorbitant charges.

We hope that training organisations will offer full packages of training of which the basic element is only one part. It is important that people taking up motor cycling should realise that it will not be a matter of, "Come and see us for a day and then do not bother to come back until the end of the time during which you can ride on your L-plates." It is better to follow the line taken by motor cycle retailers, manufacturers, training organisations and riders groups who say, rightly, that if one is to take up motor cycling, one should have full training in order to gain experience and skill with good instructors and experienced motor cyclists. I pay tribute to many in the police, road safety organisations and other groups who give their time to provide that training for new motor cyclists.

The hon. Member for Deptford also asked whether there would be enough training sites to meet demand. That point was rightly picked up on behalf of the rural interests by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale. There are now 190 different organisations authorised to provide training and the part 1 test. They operate from over 900 approved sites throughout Great Britain and employ more than 4,000 instructors. If all those training sites and instructors were to operate the new compulsory basic training, there would be enough to cope with likely demand. We are currently conducting a survey through local authority road safety officers to find out how many instructors are based at each site, whether training machines are available and to discover the current and potential throughput of trainees. The survey will identify approved sites which are not currently being used and parts of the country that are not well served by training facilities. In those areas, local motor cycle dealers may have a role to play in providing training facilities if they wish to continue to sell learner machines.

As assurance was given in the other place that the scheme will not be introduced until adequate facilities exist. I am happy to repeat that assurance now. We will take full account of the special problems of rural areas. I do not want to be led into giving too full an assurance that exemptions will be given simply on grounds of distance. We would need to find a way to overcome that problem. It is important to obtain safety for new motor cyclists whether they live in rural or built up areas. We need to recognise the widespread nature of the population and the absence of a town or city in which one could obtain a good throughput of trainees on a regular basis.

I was asked about the monitoring of standards of motor cycle instruction. The Department is already responsible for the appointment of training bodies and those who sign part 1 test certificates. The Motor Cycle Association—I pay tribute to its work in discussing the proposals—has made tentative proposals to set up a body to monitor and train the training instructors. I expect to meet the director general of the MCA on 3 May to discuss training and I hope to hear the MCA's proposition. I would not want to prejudge the reaction to the proposals until I hear from the experts how they think we should move forward. We want to move forward together.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) made the important point that motor cyclists could experience the course and demonstrate to the instructor, rather than the examiner—that is a better way of putting it—that he cannot ride safely. Trainees would successfully complete their basic training only if they demonstrate that they are able to ride unsupervised. I do not want people to believe that we are substituting a new test. We simply want people to demonstrate that they can ride competently. I may be splitting hairs, but that is not supposed to be seen as a test. Hopefully, trainees will accept that they should go on to further training and try to pass the proper test as soon as they reasonably can. The days are gone when people should expect to ride around on L-plates year after year without having to ride a motor cycle under an examiner's eyes for half an hour or more.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley also mentioned lorry and bus licensing and many hon. Members have made the same points. We are trying to bring lorry and bus licensing into line. The first full licence will run to the age of 45 and renewals for professional drivers will be every five years until the age of 65. Thereafter, an annual renewal will be needed. Medical reports will be required on each application. The medical profession generally agrees that the mid-forties is the time when serious medical conditions begin to appear. The incidence of medical conditions affecting drivers aged between 18 and 45 is small. That assertion is borne out by the cases coming before the medical advisers at Swansea. In reaching decisions on the fitness of applicants the Secretary of State will be guided by advice published by medical experts as well as by the honorary medical panels.

The hon. Member for Deptford raised the issue of compensation for time lost at work because of more frequent medical checks. I want to take this opportunity of reminding every licence holder that it states on every licence, whether it is a green or a pink licence:

> "You are required to tell the Drivers Medical Branch, DVLC, Swansea, SA1 1TU at once if you have any disability (includes any physical or medical condition) which affects (or may in the future affect) your fitness as a driver if you expect it to last more than 3 months."

That is an obligation on each of us.

I welcome the fact that many drivers notify Swansea. They are not always disqualified if they raise a question. In fact, it provides an assurance for the driver just as much as for anybody else. I suspect that many elderly people who notify Swansea of an eyesight or other medical condition are pleasantly surprised when they discover that they can continue driving. They may be subject to continued regular medical checks, but this is an assurance for the driver as well as for the rest of us. So people should not be worried about notifying conditions to Swansea. They certainly will be committing an offence if they hide a condition that should be notified.

We realise that some people in professional driving are worried about the possibility that they may have to give up driving midway in their career. The medical standards are applied to protect other road users from the consequences of collapse at the wheel of bus, lorry or other large-vehicle drivers. It is important that drivers who are not able to meet the standards do not drive such vehicles.

The provision of compensation is not a matter for Government; it has to be worked out through normal employer-employee relationships.

Drivers whose work depends on meeting certain strict health standards may also insure against unexpected deterioration in their health. It is important to recognise that this applies equally to someone who may be a service engineer or a sales person in that their job may depend upon having a driving licence. People should have the opportunity of anticipating whether their health will determine their work, and it is well worth considering insurance and, in organised groups, seeing if that can be part of negotiated contracts of employment. Otherwise individuals can do it.

The hon. Member for Deptford asked about appeals. The vast majority of reconsidered decisions are decisions taken on medical grounds and the medical adviser is the best person to apply the standards in individual cases. The courts are the most appropriate appeal forum in general. They are in the best position to give the necessary weight to additional factors that may be introduced. The ordinary licence holder has no reconsideration procedure. There is no indication that this has resulted in any unfairness, although, as I have said, the loss of an ordinary licence can be just as severe for those who depend on cars for their livelihood as the loss of a vocational licence can be to a lorry or bus driver.

The driver licensing systems and judicial processes in other European Community member states are quite different. We shall be looking closely at their arrangements.

The hon. Member for Deptford asked again, as she did on Tuesday, about the staff implications of the transfer to the DVLC in Swansea and the effect on the speed of service. Vocational licences are currently issued manually by staff in traffic area offices. When these licences are issued in Swansea it will be through the fully computerised facilities there. By replacing a manual licensing system by a computerised system and unifying vocational and ordinary driver licensing within a single system, with the economies of scale at Swansea, we shall both save staff and improve the quality of service. There may well be some increase of staff at Swansea.

The staff and administrative savings have been estimated at about £1 million a year. The turn-round times for dealing with lorry and bus driving licence transactions will be speeded up by about 40 per cent. or more. So we ought to get both a more efficient system and one that provides more advantages to the person applying for a licence or a variation of one.

I turn now to the autoguide system. The hon. Member for Deptford asked whether this would lead to rat-running. I believe that it will lead to a reduction in rat-running because often many of the rats are continuing to move but are taking longer to get to their destination. It is important that the designated roads, the main roads, are the ones that carry the through traffic. I have given strong support over the years to traffic management arrangements, whether they involve physical restraints or efforts to ease the junctions which at present encourage rat-running. That is why we have in London designated roads and some trunk roads. We want to make sure that there are not changes which lead to greater chances of rat-running.

There is no reason to think that autoguide will increase the overall volume of traffic. The main roads generally offer quicker journey times and certainly should. The proposed large-scale pilot autoguide system will allow local authorities, the police and the Department to evaluate in detail the likely effects of a commercial system, including the effects upon minor roads. The Secretary of State would be able to impose licence conditions about the roads on to which the system could direct traffic. This power is in clause 10(8)(b).

It is quite important not to set down in advance that local authorities should be able to have a veto. When the hon. Member for Deptford was talking about integrated transport authorities, I was reminded of the county London Plan 1943, the Bressey report 1938 and "History of the London County Council 1889-1939", by Gibbon and Bell. From those we see that it was local authorities that banned the expansion of the trolley bus system in London because they did not want to see overhead wires. We must regret those decisions; it would have been nice to see an expansion of the trolley bus system.

It is important that we get the experience of the pilot autoguide system. Then we shall have better information on whether my assertion is right that we should end up with less rat-running, or whether the fears which the hon. Lady has quite rightly expressed are justified.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) raised the question of the private sector and whether the Secretary of State would use his powers. We hope that he will not have to use his powers, but we have to make provision in legislation to cover eventualities. Some of us may remember the little difficulty we had on Friday in getting the cashless parking Bill through. That was to provide primary legislative cover for local authorities to charge for off-street car parks without using cash. It would be ridiculous to lose this opportunity of giving the Secretary of State the necessary powers, but we hope it will not be necessary for them to be used.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley and also, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North asked questions about clause 10 and the conditions which the Secretary of State might seek to include in licences for the operation of autoguide and other systems. As I have said, we hope that it will not be necessary to use these powers.

The hon. Member for Deptford asked about the effect of autoguide and similar systems on road safety. It is quite plain that if people know where they are driving—this applies to autoguide as well as to conventional signing and to the digital radio system to which reference has been made—they get there more quickly and by a shorter route and do not have to cover unnecessary parts of the route. That reduces the exposure to risk. It also means that they can concentrate on their driving instead of wondering whether they are going in the right direction. So all the ways of improving signing are important, including variable message signs on motorways, the BBC's radio data system and a review of the traffic signs regulations.

I mentioned that 1989 is the year of the sign. We reissued our little booklet and also a traffic advisory unit guide to road signs last week in Brighton at an exhibition. We are making major moves forward. Anyone who wants can go and look at the demonstration sign project in Guildford or the A3 signing which is coming forward and will see some of the improvements. We hope shortly to announce new ideas for signing in London and autoguide will fit in with the system, subject to Parliament. I ought to say perhaps that as a result of the agricultural crisis we

[Mr. Bottomley]

have changed the name of the illustrative motorway service area from "Good Egg" to "Good Food", in order to keep up with the times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) has reminded us again of his enthusiasm for a London traffic management unit. At the moment we have organised control of the traffic system. In King's building we have the Metropolitan police with their supervision. My hon. Friend has made various suggestions following up his Adjournment debate in December and more recently there have been reports in the papers of steeper parking fines, red lines on important routes and better parking enforcement generally. All this has been very much welcomed—except by those who have been caught. I met a group of bus and coach operators this morning who also mentioned my hon. Friend's proposals.

The hon. Member for Deptford talked about autoguides and Berlin. Berlin is a scientist's dream. There is no commuting traffic; people cannot drive in from the suburbs. The traffic management arrangement is significantly different from London's. We shall continue with the close Anglo-German co-operation.

There is much support in Europe for the British approach, which places the investment responsibility with the private sector and control and licensing in the public sector with the Secretary of State.

I will finish by referring to the eyesight point. Most of the people who have the highest involvement in injury accidents have the best eyesight. The problem in general is not people's quality of vision but the processing of the information they get through their eyes. It can be befuddled by drink or misguided by youth and inexperience. I can see that the hon. Lady does not agree with me. Perhaps we had better have another meeting with the college of opthalmologists—if that is the appropriate group—and see if we can find scientific evidence from this country or other countries showing that eyesight makes a major contribution. I suspect that if one could get younger drivers to see a psychiatrist one would be able to spot the ones who will have real trouble.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham referred to motorists from other European countries and that is a point that we can perhaps take forward. As I said on Tuesday, there is no provision for endorsing foreigners' licences. Most countries do not have that kind of system. People in many more countries are interested in our systems and are going to Swansea to see how they work. In time, the European Community may move forward to our system, so that people cannot wantonly commit offences in other countries. However, courts have power to seize the licences of foreign drivers when they commit serious offences.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley talked about light goods vehicles. That point follows the consideration of minibus driver licensing as well. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham talked about the format and durability of drivers' licences. We think that they are reasonably good, but we will see whether we can improve the plastic wallets for licences.

Having heard hon. Members' comments, I welcome the general support for both parts of the Bill. Whether we are concerned with the future of motor cycling, of autoguide or the other provisions, I hope that we can move forward and increase safety and provide a better service for those who use the roads.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

ROAD TRAFFIC (DRIVER LICENSING AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS) BILL *[Lords]* *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Road Traffic (Driver Licensing and Information Systems) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of that Act.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

ROAD TRAFFIC (DRIVER LICENSING AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS) BILL *[Lords]* *[Ways and Means]*

Resolved,

That any Act resulting from the Road Traffic (Driver Licensing and Information Systems) Bill *[Lords]* may—

(a) authorise the inclusion in licences for operating driver information systems of terms requiring the rendering of payments to the Secretary of State; and

(b) provide for the payment of those and other sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

Atomic Energy Bill *[Lords]*

[Relevant document: Third Report of the Energy Committee of Session 1988-89 on British Nuclear Fuels plc: Report and Accounts 1987-88 (HC 50).]

Order for Second Reading read.

6.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Michael Spicer): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

A prime purpose of the Bill, defined in clause 1, is to raise the financial limit imposed on British Nuclear Fuels plc by the Nuclear Industry (Finance) Acts of 1977 and 1981. The limit is currently set at £1,500 million, and clause 1 proposes that it should be increased to £2,000 million.

The financial limit consists of payments for shares in the company, the principal on outstanding Government loans to BNFL, and the guarantees given by the Government in support of BNFL's borrowing from commercial sources. We need to raise the limit so that BNFL can borrow with Government guarantees the sums required to complete its current investment programme.

To keep its place in the forefront of the nuclear fuel cycle industry, BNFL must invest for the future, and it has in hand a massive capital programme amounting to more than £5 billion to the end of the century, mainly in support of its waste management and reprocessing business at Sellafield.

The company raises its finance in the private sector, backed by Government guarantee, and under successive Governments has been classified as a private sector body for public expenditure purposes. Its borrowing is therefore not part of the public sector borrowing requirement. Guarantees are issued only for specific loans, and each application for a loan guarantee is scrutinised by the Department of Energy, the Treasury and the Bank of England before we agree to accept the liability.

BNFL expects to breach the existing statutory limit in 1990. As acknowledged yesterday by the Energy Select Committee, the main reason for this is BNFL's need to finance, up to 1992, £500 million worth of extensions and improvements to the low active waste treatment plants at Sellafield. Those plants ensure that active effluent discharges are kept as low as reasonably practicable. Radiological effluent is already less than 5 per cent. of what it was in 1978, and with this further expenditure should be reduced to near zero by the mid-1990s. Expenditure on the scale required to achieve that level was not envisaged when the current limit was set in 1981.

It is expected that BNFL's total borrowings will peak at around £1,700 million over the next four years, provided that all present income projections are realised. In the mid-1990s, as the plants now being built come on stream and start to generate funds, BNFL expects to have sufficient funds available internally to meet its capital expenditure requirements and progressively to pay off its borrowings.

BNFL has been consistently profitable since its inception, and has provided the Government, as shareholder, with a dividend for the past 12 years. In 1987-88, the dividend payment amounted to £36 million. There is no current expectation, therefore, that we would need to seek any further increases in the limit.

Clause 2 of the Bill will enable the costs of nuclear safety research which the Health and Safety Commission sponsors to be recovered from nuclear site licensees and licence applicants. The House will be aware that the Secretary of State for Energy announced last year that the role of customer for much of the safety research currently sponsored by his Department would be transferred to the Health and Safety Commission as from 1 April 1990. That will enable the commission to ensure the future adequacy and balance of nuclear safety research programmes. The programmes will be managed by the Health and Safety Executive on the commission's behalf.

The principal objectives which the commission will be asked to fulfil will be set out in agreed guidelines provided by the Secretary of State for Energy. The commission will be charged with ensuring that adequate and balanced nuclear safety research programmes continue to be carried out, and that the results of the research are disseminated to maximise their contribution to safety. This will, of course, require the commission to maintain close collaboration with the nuclear industry and the UKAEA so as to be fully aware of what safety-related work the industry is doing on its own account. The commission is establishing machinery to do that.

The commission will, however, also need to sponsor research on its own account to ensure that the totality of research is adequate and it will need to see to it that a sufficient independent nuclear safety research capacity is maintained.

The present cost of the research being transferred is about £20 million per year. The effect of the transfer will therefore be to reduce Government expenditure by that amount. Clause 2 will enable the Health and Safety Executive to recover the costs which it incurs in connection with its licensing function from nuclear site licensees and applicants for licences.

Costs relating to a licence application are not at present recoverable until a licence is granted, and cannot be recovered at all if the application is refused or withdrawn. The new provisions will enable the Health and Safety Executive to recover its costs before, and whether or not, a licence is granted.

Clauses 3 and 4 make technical amendments to the rules on insurance cover for meeting third-party compensation claims in the event of nuclear incidents. Section 18 of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 sets out the method for determining the maximum contribution which the Government might make towards meeting the cost of compensation claims. Factors which have to be taken into account are those amounts which are available from nuclear operators' insurance arrangements, and any contributions which may be available from other Governments under relevant international conventions.

At present the UKAEA, because of its position as a public sector body, is not required to cover its liabilities by commercial insurance arrangements. However, following the Atomic Energy Authority Act 1986, the authority's operations are now being undertaken on a more commercial "trading fund" basis, and occasions may arise —for instance, when a trading partner is involved—when commercial insurance is considered a more attractive option than the self-insurance which is normal for Government bodies. This clause will remove any doubt which might exist about whether funds available from any such commercial insurance should be taken into account when computing the Government's contribution. It also removes any possible doubt about whether insurers would have a liability to pay.

[Mr. Michael Spicer]

Clause 4 is designed to overcome an unintended defect which has come to light in the drafting of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965. It will avoid the need for new insurance cover to be taken out when a new nuclear site licence has to be issued for purely technical reasons—for instance, where the boundaries of an existing site are extended.

Clause 5 makes the necessary changes to our domestic law to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the international convention on assistance in the case of a nuclear accident or radiological emergency, widely known as the mutual assistance convention. That is one of two conventions negotiated under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency following the accident at Chernobyl. The other relates to early notification.

We need to make no changes to the law in respect of the early notification convention, but we intend to ratify both conventions at the same time. The Government have already agreed to act as though bound by the two conventions.

Before ratification of the mutual assistance convention, two changes to our domestic legislation are required. Clause 5 makes the necessary financial provision to enable payments to be made in the event of the United Kingdom responding to a request for assistance and to receive payments if we decide to seek the reimbursement provided for in the convention. It also provides the necessary cover for affording certain privileges and immunities to persons from a state which is providing assistance. The United Kingdom was one of the first signatories to those conventions, which have been in force for some time. It is important that we should be able to ratify them as soon as possible, and the provisions of clause 5 will enable us to do that.

This is a largely technical but nevertheless important Bill. I have made my opening remarks about it essentially factual, but I will answer any points that hon. Members wish to raise if, with the leave of the House, I speak again at the end of the debate.

I should make two comments about the report of the Energy Select Committee which was published yesterday and which Mr. Speaker has ruled is debatable today. The first concerns the question of BNFL's costs. The Committee's report focuses attention on the eightfold increase in costs at the low level disposal site at Drigg. That has been interpreted by some commentators as a general criticism of cost control at BNFL. Clearly, that is a misinterpretation of the facts put forward by the Committee. The Government believe that a privatised electricity industry, in which nuclear costs in particular will be much more clearly exposed, will motivate BNFL further to improve its cost controls, especially as the switch is made from cost plus to fixed price contracts.

Secondly, I believe that the Committee has been grossly misrepresented on the question of the dumping of foreign nuclear waste from the pre-1976 contracts. All contracts for the reprocessing of spent fuel signed after 1976 are subject to clauses requiring the return of waste to the countries of origin. Reports in the press have talked today of 1,500 tonnes of waste from the pre-1976 contracts requiring storage in this country. That has resulted from a misreading of the Committee's report. In fact, the 1,500 tonnes is spent fuel, 97 per cent. of which is recovered in the form of plutonium and uranium.

About 100 cubic metres, or two bus loads, of high level waste—rather different from 1,500 tonnes—will arise from that reprocessing, which is a small portion of the total waste arising up to the year 2000. All contracts signed since 1976—in particular the vast majority of the £2 billion worth of business signed up with the Japanese, which makes THORP the largest earner of yen in the country—require the repatriation of waste.

Should the House wish me to do so, I will elaborate further on the Government's initial views on the Select Committee report.

6.34 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I thank the Minister for explaining the provisions of what appears to be an innocuous Bill. As he said, they are designed primarily to raise the borrowing limits of British Nuclear Fuels plc, to tidy up current legislation and to bring us into line with Europe so that we may comply with the convention to which he referred. Opposition Members have no wish to oppose any of those aims. Indeed, from the point of view of the convention and the tidying up of current legislation, we regard the Bill as a step forward.

We applaud the timing of the Bill, for two reasons. First, the measure relates to the privatisation of the electricity supply industry; secondly, it forces us to reiterate many of the doubts that were raised in the report of the Select Committee on Energy which was published yesterday and which Mr. Speaker has ruled is relevant to this debate.

We are told that the borrowing limits must be increased to finance the completion of THORP, the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield in Cumbria. The history of that construction, like that of much of the nuclear power industry, is littered with increases in costs and time scales.

When permission was first granted for the THORP plant in 1978, it was to take nine years to complete, at a cost of £300 million. By 1983, the time scale had been extended to 12 years and the cost to £1·2 billion. By the beginning of this year, the start-up was expected to take place 14 years after permission was first granted, at a cost of £1·1 billion more than the first estimate of £300 million. There has been a truly incredible increase in capital cost and time scale. Some, if not all, of those additional costs have occurred as a result of the nuclear installations inspectorate having examined the original plans and decided—presumably because of lessons that were learned about the nuclear industry—that it was necessary to alter the plans substantially.

While all that has been going on, the cost of reprocessing oxide fuels has risen sharply. As a result, there will be an operating loss, certainly on the earliest contracts that were made on a fixed cost basis, a subject to which the Minister referred and to which I will return. May we be told how much the loss is likely to be on those early fixed-price contracts? Who will shoulder the burden of that loss—BNFL, as a result of this measure, or the taxpayer?

BNFL reports that the cost of the construction of THORP will be recouped by about the year 2000, taking into account the early contracts that were signed with the British nuclear industry and some foreign companies.

What the future holds, after those contracts have been completed, one cannot say. After all, the reprocessing plant has a potential life of 25 years. The potential for acquiring contracts after those already signed have expired is questionable because, by that time, there will be continental reprocessing plants bidding in competition. It is clear that, at that stage, BNFL will not be seen as the only organisation capable of handling nuclear waste. Clearly, a number of question marks hang over the future of the reprocessing plant.

In the home market, the CEGB—which will become National Power if the Government have their way and nuclear generating is handed to the private sector—and the successor company in Scotland to the SSEB suggested, have no contracts for reprocessing. There is also doubt about whether fuel from the AGRs and PWRs to be built at Sizewell and Hinkley should go for reprocessing.

Nobody questions the fact that Magnox waste must be reprocessed because of its dangerous condition and deterioration after its useful life in a reactor. We must therefore take action on it. Whether or not the reprocessing of AGR and PWR fuels will be necessary in the future has been questioned in the Select Committee's report and several times previously by people who are eminent in this subject, who believe that dry storage of such fuels would perhaps be a safer and cleaner way of handling them once they have come to the end of their useful lives in nuclear reactors.

The market to which reprocessing was to sell its plutonium—the fast breeder reactor market—has currently been suspended by the Government. No doubt the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) will want to mention that later. It was envisaged that THORP might be a place where fuel could be prepared for the fast breeder reactors, and not just in this country—we do not limit ourselves—because we might have found a market elsewhere in the world. Although it was envisaged that THORP might have played a useful role, the report has brought that into question.

The world price of uranium is lower than the cost of reprocessing recycled uranium, and is likely to remain so. The report also highlighted the fact that, in the past decade, there has not been the increase that people thought there might have been in the cost of uranium. Although the availability of that type of fuel can be limited, at the moment it is still plentiful on the market and hence there has been only a reasonable increase in its cost, which is not as excessive as that of some other fuels.

As the Select Committee report states:

"The public perception of the safety record of BNFL and the well-known difficulties here and abroad of accounting accurately for plutonium stocks have not helped the environmental case for reprocessing."

It is interesting that the Minister has said that his Department has scrutinised each and every contract entered into by BNFL. One would think that that is only right because the Government are the only shareholder of the company, but if there has been scrutiny at the level that the Minister suggested we must question why we have not had any proper explanation about increasing the cost of the THORP project.

More importantly, there is also a question mark over the further use of THORP because the first contracts that were signed on what, until the debate started, we were led to believe was a cost-plus basis have ended and, over their time scale, have presumably paid for all the extra expenses involved in the construction of THORP. As we are being asked to grant permission for BNFL to borrow more money, it is only right that we ask the Government to justify their already massive investment and that involved in their future plans, especially in view of what I have said about the likely use of the THORP project.

The experience of THORP does not bode well for the planned large-scale thermal mixed oxide fuel fabrication facility that is currently being contracted and built at THORP. From the Select Committee report, we understand that neither the CEGB nor, presumably, its successor, which will comprise the same people in the same business—National Power—nor the SSEB, nor its successor in the Scottish nuclear power industry, has any plans at this stage to use the mixed oxide fuel, which is also known by the abbreviation of MOX. While BNFL says that there will be a price advantage over conventional fuel, the electricity generating companies say that there will not. The fact is that £50 million may seem a small amount now but that money is currently being expended and, as the report rightly points out, there is some doubt about whether the project will produce fuel for the nuclear electricity market in years to come.

As the report stated, perhaps the Government will assess who is correct before the proposals are advanced. That point is worthy of an answer at a later stage in our proceedings on the Bill, if not tonight. I think that we shall wish to take the Bill into Committee, perhaps for just a short time. Hon. Members who served on the Committee on the Electricity Bill will be pleased to know that. Nevertheless, the report has highlighted many questions that need answering and I hope we shall receive answers to them.

Perhaps there will be an opportunity for the Minister to tell us who is to take over the ownership of the stocks of plutonium and whether the private sector electricity companies will police that. In our earlier debates on the Electricity Bill, I used the phrase, "selling off the family plutonium". Without question this important issue concerns many people.

I am sure that people are well aware of the trade in weapons-grade plutonium throughout the world. If we can believe much of the international debate, many countries that we, as a country, feel are unstable are handling such fuels. We have heard on several occasions that publicly owned or part publicly owned companies have not always been too good at handling weapons-grade plutonium. Indeed, we are led to believe that it has left these and other shores that are supposed to be responsible when handling it and that it has ended up on shores which we may not like to be used as a basic material for nuclear weapons. We are concerned about that, and this debate gives the Minister an opportunity to tell us what the Government envisage will happen in the new framework.

That issue also begs the question of some of the strong rumours that we have heard, that BNFL itself may be a candidate for privatisation in the years ahead. If the present ideology continues, perhaps the only thing that is likely to be saved from privatisation is the air that we breathe—*[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps the Government are considering it, because the Minister is nodding his head. As some of the people who currently advise the Government probably are considering it, we shall have to wait and see what happens. If BNFL were to go into the private sector, that would again raise the question of

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

exactly who will look after plutonium in the future. We hope to hear one or two comments from the Minister on that at some stage.

As the Select Committee report stated, it seems that the Government have maintained

"the profitability of BNFL, a Government-owned plc, but" reduced

"greatly the profitability of the public corporations which the Government is about to privatise."

The Minister will remember the famous draft letter of January—one of many to which we referred in our proceedings on the Electricity Bill—written by Mr. John Baker, the chief executive-designate of National Power, who had grave concerns about privatised nuclear electricity generation and about who would have to pick up what has become, week by week, a growing and expensive bill. That fact was highlighted in the Select Committee's report. Back in January, in the letter that was drafted but not sent, Mr. Baker warned the Government that the flotation of National Power was at risk and that one of the reasons for that was the prices charged by BNFL for the nuclear fuel cycle.

Mr. Baker stated:

"we do not see how National Power with an arms length contract with BNFL is in any position to put additional incentives on BNFL . . . if HMG as its shareholder cannot."

It appears that Mr. Baker won the argument at the time. At least, we can assume that, because we have not had a statement from the Government. However, on 23 March, *The Guardian* stated:

"The Government signalled its willingness to provide a nuclear indemnity after ministers were told that financial institutions would not invest in a venture with as many financial uncertainties as nuclear power."

Therefore, if, according to Mr. Baker, the newly privatised National Power is only to meet the costs of nuclear power which, as *The Guardian* put it, are "within management control", what will be the status of its contracts with BNFL?

At the moment, contracts are made on a "cost unknown" basis at the time of signing. Have those contracts been renegotiated as the CEGB and the SSEB have wanted for a considerable number of years? If so, what effect will that have on the reprocessing plant at Sellafield? If those contracts have been renegotiated, how much will the Government give BNFL to buy out the existing contracts? That is very important, because someone will have to pay if the cost-plus contracts are being bought out.

People interested in the nuclear industry, and British taxpayers, will want to know how the change in cost-plus contracts will take place. If they have been renegotiated, are the Government content to see the contracts continue under their present terms? I understand that the overseas contracts have also been made on a cost-plus basis. Will there be a change in the British element in THORP, but no change in the foreign element? The Bill gives us an opportunity to debate those matters and seek answers to those questions.

If we give the Bill a Second Reading, we should also scrutinise the process which has been established for the costs of decommissioning. BNFL's customers' liability for BNFL decommissioning costs has risen more than fivefold despite a 58 per cent. reduction in the present value of the total liability by the use of a 2 per cent. a year discount. However, that is based on present prices. By the time decommissioning takes place, depending on when the very expensive third phase is finished, the costs are bound to have risen considerably. The history of the nuclear industry suggests that that will happen and that back-end costs are likely to rise in the same way as front-end costs have risen.

We can only assume that BNFL is postponing decommissioning to avoid the costs today. By putting off for 100 years the non-productive high cost end of the nuclear fuel cycle, BNFL reduces the cost for its customers today.

I hope that the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), who was the Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy which sought oral evidence from BNFL in November last year, will be able to clarify a point for me. I believe that it was the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) who asked Mr. Neville Chamberlain a question, part of which was:

"Since the nuclear industry has always claimed that decommissioning presents no technical or safety problems, could you perhaps take this opportunity of reassuring the Committee that this delay is not designed to boost short-term profits?"

Mr. Chamberlain replied:

"We can certainly give the assurance that it is designed to boost short-term profits."

There may be a printing error in that memorandum to the Select Committee. For the year under consideraton, there would have been a difference in terms of annual profits involving £14 million. If BNFL believes that spreading decommissioning over a long period helps its annual costs, we can assume that the CEGB and the SSEB—and presumably National Power—are thinking along the same lines. Their policy will be much the same.

My next points relate to the Electricity Bill, which has just completed its Report stage in this House. The Select Committee on Energy and many other people have suggested that the time scale for decommissioning may be brought forward, while Mr. Chamberlain has said that the time scale is an important accountancy factor. Bearing those two points in mind, schedule 12 to the Electricity Bill might be triggered.

In Standing Committee, when we debated clause 88, we asked how the money in schedule 12, which is not Government money, as the Prime Minister often tells us, but taxpayers' money, involving billions of pounds, could be triggered for use in the nuclear industry if the regulatory body or the Government decided to change the time scale.

Mr. John Baker's draft letter revealed his deep unhappiness at having to buy the nuclear part of electricity generation along with a substantial tranche of fossil fuel plants. If Mr. Baker is now satisfied that he will not incur any additional costs, has his satisfaction been gained through the possible use of the triggering of schedule 12 of the Electricity Bill? Has that trigger made Mr. Baker happy about taking on board the nuclear industry, because he was deeply unhappy about it last January? Post-privatisation—in a few years' time—will there be a change in the time scale for decommissioning? Will that trigger schedule 12 and bring taxpayers' money into this very expensive nuclear industry to satisfy the people who will take it over?

We welcome certain aspects of the Bill. We welcome the involvement of the Health and Safety Executive with the nuclear installations inspectorate and the United

Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. Hopefully, that will improve people's perception of nuclear safety. Obviously, spreading the financial responsibilities is welcome.

We welcome clauses 3 and 4, which relate to insurance cover. We assume that the proposals are the right way to proceed, although we hope that the provisions are never put to the test. However, we never know with this industry. There are large questions marks hanging over the nuclear industry, although thankfully not because of anything which has happened on a large scale in this country. But there are questions about liability should a major incident arise on the scale of Three Mile Island or Chernobyl.

Clause 5 provides that the mutual assistance convention should be ratified. While the Opposition are pleased about that, we hope that it is not undermined in a way that was described in *The Independent* today. A civil servant was giving evidence to the Select Committee on Defence yesterday about the scuttling of nuclear submarines. I think that "scuttling" is the correct term, and I should know because my father served in the Navy for a considerable time during the war. I had understood that the London dumping convention to protect the environment would cover such scuttling and the Government claimed that the signing of that convention was a victory and a major step towards cleaning the world's environment.

However, Mr. Nigel Paren, a senior MOD official, is quoted in *The Independent* as saying:

> "The Royal Navy's decommissioned nuclear submarines could be dumped at sea, despite the international convention against sea-disposal of vessels and harmful waste."

If that is the case, I hope that, as soon as the convention in clause 5 is ratified, the Minister will tell all his civil servants exactly what that means. I hope that the convention will never need to be used, but these plans need to be made in case there are more incidents of the type that we saw in America and the USSR. I hope that the Government have a strong commitment to the convention. I shall be interested to see how our nuclear submarines are removed. I understand that one of them is in dry dock.

I hope that the Minister will attempt to answer my questions either during the debate or later in Committee, because these issues are important for the industry and the British taxpayer. Our electricity generating industry and BNFL have been in public hands and perhaps that means that things are not as transparent as they will be in future.

No matter what happens in future, we are talking about considerable nuclear costs. All the rights given by the Government to BNFL to borrow more money should be accompanied by instructions to use the money in a proper way. Whether or not we build new generators, Britain's nuclear industry will be with us for decades. We must make sure that it is soundly based and that investment in it is for good reasons. We must not invest in forms of technology that do not have a useful life. It is not our intention to move against the Bill, but perhaps we shall discuss it at greater length in Committee. We support much of the Bill, but some of it begs many questions.

7.1 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): Once again, when one surveys the vast expanse of naked green on both sides of the House, one realises that when the House is tempted to discuss technical matters it is rather inclined to rear like a temperamental horse overtaken by an unsilenced motor car in a country lane. Perhaps that is not surprising in view of the many technical terms and facts in the Bill and the issues surrounding it. I shall come to that.

I know that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) prides himself on two apprenticeships that he served in the energy industry. The one in which he probably takes the most pride was his experience as a coal miner. The second, in which I hope he takes some pride, was his service for a time on the Select Committee on Energy on which we were very glad to have him. I was, therefore, pleased to hear him say at the end of his speech that he accepted the undoubted fact that the nuclear industry will be with us, and probably worldwide, for a long time. If some of the preliminary evidence that we have seen on the greenhouse effect, not only in this country but in virtually all the major industrial countries that are examining this issue, proves to be what is suggested, it looks as if there could be a dramatic and major expansion of the nuclear industry.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Energy for raising the two points on which he thought my Committee had been misrepresented. I accept without hesitation or qualification that we were rather misrepresented on the question of the so-called dumping of nuclear waste. That is a highly emotive phrase, and unfortunately when it appears in any Government document or Select Committee report it tends to be the first thing that the press seizes on because I think that it shares the rather limited public perception of what exactly is meant by the results of the reprocessing of all kinds of nuclear materials.

I cannot go all the way with my hon. Friend the Minister on costs. He suggested that my Committee made an innocent—I think that was the word he used—misinterpretation of the situation at Drigg. That may or may not be so, but later I intend to deal with cost increases that my Committee and I regarded as serious matters. In a sense, the discussion on the Bill, which will increase the borrowing limits of BNFL by £500 million, is purely financial and technical. However, it raises much larger problems and graver issues.

The task of the Select Committee on Energy is to examine annually the major energy industries in the public sector. Our report was both relevant and timely, although I concede and fully understand the dismay that it may have caused to British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. I have the greatest respect for BNFL both as a company and an organisation and for what it is trying to do in and for Britain. I have also the greatest respect for its management. However, if I cannot escape the obligation of scrutiny, BNFL cannot escape its consequences.

To some extent, both the Committee and BNFL were the victims of tendentious selection in the way that our results were presented. For example, as my hon. Friend the Minister has said, it has apparently been widely reported in the press that the Committee recommended the renegotiation of contracts. We did not do that at all. What we said was carefully considered. We said that we would strongly favour a recommendation that BNFL should renegotiate those contracts "were that practical." That phrase was quite deliberately inserted. We see no prospect of BNFL customers wishing to receive waste when they have entered contracts under which BNFL has undertaken to look at that matter. That is the first and quite serious misrepresentation.

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

We were told that BNFL has been criticised for accepting contracts that made the United Kingdom a dumping ground for nuclear waste. The Committee strongly supports what BNFL is doing and believes that it is doing it well. There are some aspects of costs, with which I shall later deal, but BNFL's technical capacity is undoubted. We understand that it is immensely profitable for BNFL and for the United Kingdom for BNFL to do this work. However, we call, I think with some justification, for circumspection or caution over contracts that allow the United Kingdom to become, in the words of the Committee,

"a repository for waste generated abroad."

That was a deliberately low-key phrase and I emphasise the low-key intention of the Committee in reporting it in that way. The reason for that is that BNFL cannot handle it safely and profitability in the public relations sense if the public perception of all the problems surrounding the storage and proper technical handling of nuclear waste are such that the appropriate solutions cannot be adopted for what has often properly been called the "not in back my backyard" syndrome. That is a powerful syndrome when it comes to dealing with anything in the nuclear industry. It is because this public perception of the risks involved is seriously flawed that the Committee reached the conclusions that it did. We have advised caution.

In terms of radiation we all live on one planet. It is in the interests of the whole human race for nuclear waste to be skilfully handled by those who have the technical competence to do it, and not many have. About three or four major countries can do it and nothing would be more disastrous than to encourage countries that do not have the skills or technologies to set out on their own.

BNFL believes that we have been inaccurate in referring to very large price increases. That brings me to the point made by my hon. Friend the Minister. BNFL quoted Drigg in its press release this morning. Let us look at the facts. All these are taken either directly from BNFL's evidence or from the evidence that the Committee received from the Central Electricity Generating Board or the South of Scotland electricity board. I shall give the first example by quoting from page 9 of our report.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In my speech I did not in any way criticise the Committee for its interpretation of the facts. I said that it concentrated on particular costs and that people outside then generalised on the Committee's arguments.

Sir Ian Lloyd: I am obliged to my hon. Friend and I accept what he says.

I shall now turn to the specific instances that justify my Committee's conclusions. On page 9 of the report the CEGB evidence suggested that in three specific areas the increases in price over a short period were 129 per cent., 20 per cent. and 27 per cent. On page 34 of our report there is a memorandum from the South of Scotland electricity board which drew attention to another area where the increase was 75 per cent. On page 36 the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority in its memorandum gave the amounts that Harwell paid BNFL for the disposal of low-level waste at Drigg. For the year 1985-86 the cost was £26 million, for 1986-87 it was £29 million, for 1987-88 it was £145 million and for 1988-89 it was £260 million. The percentage increases available from those figures are 10·8 per cent., 388 per cent. and 79 per cent. Those are dramatic increases. On page 37 of the report the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority pointed out that the decommissioning charge for 10 years had been estimated in 1986 at £85 million, but by 1987 it had gone up to £164 million.

I turn to BNFL's own submission to raise much more serious issues. Evidence was taken from BNFL by the Select Committee on 10 December 1986. It estimated the total cost for decommissioning the nuclear facilities in the United Kingdom at £143 million; for Calder Hall and Chapelcross the cost was £30 million per station, and for the CEGB £60 million per station. When we considered the question again in 1987 the CEGB upped its estimate to £330 million and the evidence suggested that the figure lay between, at the most optimistic estimate, £185 million, and, at the most pessimistic, £1,000 million. My Committee recommended that the CEGB clarify its costings.

Meanwhile, roughly at the same time, the Select Committee on the Environment reported. I shall return to that because the inference of its report has been quoted in defence, understandably, by BNFL. BNFL's own figures appear in annex 1 on page 27 of our report. They show that the total liability for decommissioning has grown from £438 million to £4,605 million. Those figures are my major concern. I wish to examine them. The Select Committee has sought, and will be seeking, more information on them.

I should like to give the House a benchmark by which we can perhaps validate my and other judgments on the matter. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development produced an extremely interesting report in 1986 on the decommissioning of nuclear facilities. What comes out of it is an interesting range of costs for decommissioning what one might describe as standard pressurised water reactors and boiling water reactors. It is £140 million to £150 million per reactor. The figures are available for anyone who would like to see them.

The most informative analysis, which is also contained in that report, is from the United States, understandably, because that country has the largest civil reactor industry. Therefore, its analysis is most complete. Here we find some extraordinarily interesting information. The surplus facilities management programme of the Department of Energy in the United States plans to decommission 350 nuclear facilities over 20 years from 1986 to 2006 at a cost in total of $1·4 billion, or roughly $4 million per facility. The 1986 United States budget provision for that was a mere $56 million.

There are three other interesting figures. The stabilisation of uranium tailings piles is to cost a total of $745 million, or $30 million per pile. The West Valley reprocessing plant will cost $136 million to decommission. The Shippingport reactor, which is the world's first commercial reactor to be decommissioned, will cost $98 million.

Now I come to a very interesting table which sets out the total picture for the United States. We glean the following facts from the table. There are 77 reactors in a large sample, of which the costs of 65 are known and the costs of 12 are unknown. The total known cost of decommissioning that large amount of nuclear power is estimated at $3·7 billion, or $57 million per reactor. If we take an average of $57 million for each of the 12 plants for which no figures are known, we achieve a total cost for the

whole of this major segment of the United States nuclear industry of $4·42 billion or—I deliberately translate it into sterling—roughly £2·6 billion. That is over the period from 1984 to 2119. It is remarkable that we should even be contemplating anything for 2119 when obviously no one here will have much interest in what is happening. I want to draw the attention of the House to the scale of that: £2·6 billion is roughly the cost of a major new nuclear facility such as Sizewell.

Let us turn to BNFL's figures for the United Kingdom. They have risen from £438 million to £4,605 million. That is a total of $7,800 billion at $1·7 to the pound. Now comes the crucial comparison. Let us consider the size of the respective nuclear industries in the United States and the United Kingdom. Because statistics are so often carefully selected by those who choose to achieve one result or another, I have deliberately taken three bases of comparison—the use of oil equivalent, that is, conversion of nuclear power to oil; megawatts, electric capacity; and terawatt hours. The figures for the first are 124 million tonnes and 11 million tonnes; for the second, 101 million MWe and 14 million MWe; and for the third, 455 TWh and 48·9 TWh.

So the United Kingdom has roughly one tenth of the United States' nuclear capacity and one third of the nuclear capacity which is summarised in the report of the OECD; the decommissioning costs have been estimated at a total of $4·42 billion. That third is now forecast to cost $3·42 billion more than the total estimate for the United States programme, which is three times as great. That is an astonishing figure. It suggests that we are proposing to spend on decommissioning resources of the order of two Sizewells, the Channel tunnel or the Severn barrage. I use those figures to give the House an idea of the scale.

I come now to BNFL'S explanation. It says that it responded to a suggestion made to it by the Select Committee when it appeared before us that it should look more carefully at decommissioning costs. We certainly made that suggestion. BNFL would probably plead in its defence that it took even more seriously two suggestions by the Select Committee on the Environment. That Committee recommended that the industry should do better than the shoestring approach, and then said that the industry should really embrace the concept of a Rolls-Royce solution. It would be very easy to say, "Some shoestring"; I prefer to say, "Some Rolls-Royce".

The whole issue is complex, confused and, because of its scale, alarming. Britain cannot expect to agonise over the budgetary constraints, as we do in virtually every Department of state, and vote almost £4,000 million on the nod of the basis of the information that we have. That is why we must discover much more about the scope and cost of that programme and what raised the estimate by £4 billion.

As my Committee warned, the City's judgment of the whole privatisation procedure is bound to be affected by those figures. How can it be otherwise? Some months ago in the House I warned my right hon. and hon. Friends in the kindest possible way that I suspected that those costs would provide a major obstacle to what I believe they were trying to achieve. I cannot help but conclude that they will prove to be just such a major obstacle.

As to the carriage by air of plutonium, the Select Committee on the Environment made a specific recommendation, which I endorse—particularly after Lockerbie. The Committee stated that that practice should be prohibited. Has it been prohibited? If not, has the whole question been considered? If it has been considered, what conclusion was reached? My judgment is that if plutonium is to be transported between this country and Japan, or to any other distant part of the globe, the only way that should be done is in a triple-hull, unsinkable ship escorted by a frigate. Even that would present certain dangers.

We are in a sense considering the long-term implications of our current nuclear industry, which could grow dramatically if, as a consequence of analysis of the greenhouse effect, the developed industrial world—all power-using countries—decides that there must be a significant increase in the use of nuclear power. If that occurs, all the known problems and the whole analysis on which they are based will become dramatically more important.

Public and other misconceptions will arise and grow naturally, and they will often be fed by vested interest groups of one sort or another. Sometimes, the public are fed those misconceptions with great irresponsibility. Nevertheless, those misconceptions must not be allowed to foreclose the nuclear option. That is why we must insist on the most accurate, verifiable information that can possibly be obtained, and that it be made available to the House, where it can be fully discussed. Where there is risk assessment, it must be thorough and realistic. There really is no alternative.

7.22 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) made an extremely important speech to which the whole House will have listened and, more importantly, will read with great attention. However, it must be said that this occasion is not wholly suitable for considering the wider implications of the Select Committee's important report. It is in a sense unfortunate that the debate follows within 24 hours of the report's publication. That may explain to some extent the phenomenon to which the hon. Gentleman drew attention —the emptiness of the Chamber this evening.

The hon. Member for Havant rested his speech on the frail support of this relatively modest Bill—although one recognises that the terms of the Select Committee's report were specifically allowed by Mr. Speaker, and that is welcome. The hon. Gentleman began his speech by drawing attention to the consensus in all parts of the House that the nuclear industry is here to stay and that, whatever decisions may be taken about the commissioning of new power stations, we shall continue to be affected by it for many decades to come. The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) concluded his speech on that important point.

The Bill deals with three principal, discrete matters—the first of which is the increase in British Nuclear Fuel plc's borrowing powers. That is to some extent a technical matter, but it allows one to raise the wider question as to whether the reasons for BNFL's increased costs are as have been stated by the Minister. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will comment on the argument made by his hon. Friend the Member for Havant about decommissioning costs. However, I realise that the Government must give a considered reply to the Select Committee's report and will not be able to answer in full this evening all the points that have been and will be made.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

I want to reinforce a question asked by the hon. Member for Rother Valley. So many questions have been asked that the Minister may be tempted not to deal with them all. However, he ought to say something about the extraordinary report that appeared in today's issue of *The Independent* of a proposal by a Ministry of Defence official that nuclear submarines could be scuttled as a way of dealing with the decommissioning problem. I hope that the Minister will reassure the House that such is not the Government's intention, because that solution is neither acceptable nor in accordance with our international agreements.

The first principal subject I want to address that is directly related to the Bill is the need for a commitment to long-term nuclear research and development, which arises directly out of clause 2. From 1 April 1990, the Health and Safety Executive will, under the terms of the Bill, assume responsibility on behalf of the Health and Safety Commission for managing certain nuclear safety research currently undertaken by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and financed by the Department of Energy. It is vital to have a long-term programme of nuclear safety research and development, and it is insufficient to contemplate fire brigade action—turning out a task force of scientists and engineers to respond only when a nuclear safety problem rears its head. Instead, a dedicated team undertaking long-term research is needed, whose advice on safety matters would be immediately available if required, and whose foresight would ensure that sources of concern about nuclear safety are averted.

That view was expressed by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology, which stated in volume 1 of its report of 22 December 1987, entitled "Research and Development of Nuclear Power":

"Companies in commercial production often feel the need to cut back on activities that do not show immediate commercial returns. Long-term research and development is by definition such an activity, but it is nevertheless essential. If the privatised industry fails to make its own arrangements, the Committee believes that the Government should make arrangements for them. It is ultimately the Government who are responsible for the long-term security of the nation's supplies of energy. Privatisation does not change that."

Legislation, or at least firm Government policy, may be needed in the context of current plans to privatise the electricity supply industry in order to preserve intact vital long-term research and development programmes. The Minister spoke of a £20 million reduction in Department of Energy expenditure. All the Government propose is a change in the route by which funding from the industry reaches the authority. I fear that that direct use of industry money to fund research and development programmes may dangerously distort long-term safety research programmes, and starve vital projects of funds in that way.

My next point concerns an omission from the Bill that is both surprising and significant. I refer to the lack of any provision to make good a defect in the legislation under which the UKAEA handles contracts and consultancy work and the fruits of its research and development. The staff of the Atomic Energy Authority represent a unique national resource—comparable with our resources of coal, oil and gas. It not only founded a major industry in this country, providing half the electricity in Scotland through nuclear power stations but now it is increasingly expanding its non-nuclear research and development activities. It is able to offer the benefits of its research and development to British industry.

The authority should be able to derive full commercial benefit from the results of the research and development programme which it is permitted to carry out in non-nuclear areas. Its main enabling statutes—the Atomic Energy Authority Acts 1954 and 1986, and the Science and Technology Act 1965—restrict the ways in which the authority can pursue this commercialisation. It is not permitted to carry out non-nuclear manufacturing or commercial service activities based on its research findings, which is a major disadvantage. The Government have known of this for some time.

The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology clearly saw this matter in the same light as I did. Volume 1 of its report on research and development in nuclear power says:

"The UKAEA now operates on a trading fund basis. The Government wishes the UKAEA to be managed as far as possible commercially: but it proposes to continue the statutory restrictions which prevent the UKAEA from participating directly in the commercial exploitation of its expertise. The Committee feel this is inconsistent and they recommend that these restrictions be relaxed, providing there is no element of subsidy in tendering for commercial contracts."

Why has the opportunity not been taken to include in the Bill that modification of these constituting Acts to allow the Atomic Energy Authority to engage in that commercial activity directly? It seemed the ideal vehicle by which to do so.

I shall turn to a wider, third issue—the Bill does not reflect a national policy or strategy concerning the generation of electricity from nuclear power stations. The atomic energy industry is in disarray as a result of the Government's disaggregation of the supply industry—proposed through privatisation and the setting up of new companies. Formerly, the Central Electricity Generating Board had taken upon its shoulders the business of formulating and promulgating a national strategy.

However, present signs are that National Power, the biggest of the companies in the disaggregated supply industry, is not prepared to take the same responsibility for formulating and promulgating a nuclear electricity strategy. The Government recognise this difficulty because they have ring-fenced the nuclear industry. However, that is a sterile, and inevitably temporary, measure. They define the industry as one which has the present size and type of nuclear installation, and offer no plan for adding to, or substituting for, those installations in a systematic way. That is sterile because, as Ministers have acknowledged, the ring fence will remain in place for only a few years. What will happen after that? Ministers have been vague about that in debates on the privatisation Bill. They seem to imply that nuclear power will have to stand on its own feet at the end of that period, or perhaps for 10 years. However, we all know what that is likely to mean—a process of erosion where, as reactors are shut down, they are replaced by whatever is the economic flavour of the day. At the moment, that would be stations fuelled by natural gas.

This is not a strategy, a policy or even a proper response to market forces in an industry in which planning and constructing a nuclear power station takes a decade, and the station may operate for half a century. A national energy policy is needed. Although I cannot expect the

Minister, in replying to the debate, to outline such a policy, the fact that the debate is conducted in this vacuum is striking. The proposals in the Bill do little to show even the way in which Ministers are thinking.

The Minister will remember, because he alluded to it during debates on the privatisation Bill, the views of the County Emergency Planning Officers Society about the need for composite off-site emergency planning. I understand that, in November, the Department of Energy set up a liaison group as a national forum for considering public protection aspects of nuclear emergency planning. When the Electricity Bill was considered on Report, the Minister said that the lack of formal responsibility on local authorities to produce emergency plans for nuclear installations, such as exist for the chemical industry, had been noted. He said that legislative help was on the way for the integration of plans.

The Bill has not been chosen as the vehicle for such help. What prospects are there for such legislation? The Bill ratifies the international convention on assistance in the case of accident or radiological emergency. It seems odd that these further safety measures, which are certainly cognate with the convention, have not been included in the Bill. When will the Minister's deliberations be completed?

The Bill is broadly acceptable and its passage through the House should be supported. I hope that the fact that it has been linked tonight with some debate on the report of the Select Committee on Energy does not mean that this will be the sole opportunity for the House to debate the report of the hon. Member for Havant and his colleagues, because the subject that it covers goes beyond the ambit of the Bill, is important and should not be addressed in a short debate with the short notice that we have been given.

7.39 pm

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): Having listened with considerable interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), I believe that he has adequately dealt with the escalation in costs. In defence of British Nuclear Fuels, I say only that it has had to maintain high standards, set by the nuclear installations inspectorate, and to deal with waste disposal to the satisfaction of the Select Committee on the Environment. A Rolls-Royce solution was much too expensive for the low level waste, but it seems to have adopted one. It has also done a remarkable job in cutting down effluent discharges. Those activities have, cumulatively, escalated its costs. In a press release it indicated that one of the principal increases was due to the additional expenditure at Drigg, which is understood.

Paragraph 51 of the report says:

"Under the new policy, the estimated current cost of decommissioning all BNFL plant and facilities is £4·6 billion".

A little further on it says:

"Despite this 58 per cent. reduction due to discounting, customers' liability for BNFL decommissioning costs has risen more than fivefold. Furthermore, BNFL's percentage share appears to have decreased significantly from approximately 23 per cent. to approximately 10 per cent. of the total."

That means that over the years money flows into the coffers which could be spent on new plant and equipment. It is paid now, but the liability for BNFL will come a long time later. BNFL has been able to spread some of the risk among its customers.

That is one way of looking at the matter, but there is another way. In the *Financial Times* of 12 October 1988 it was reported that Dr. Harry Lawton, a former head of the laboratories at Sellafield, had said at an international conference that

"Decommissioning and disposing of nuclear power stations might cost the equivalent of up to 20 per cent. of the electricity generated over their lifetime."

The cost is enormous, and we must not overlook it.

Nuclear waste is another source of high expenditure. By the year 2000 the cost of disposing of the quantity of high-level waste, at £495,000 per cubic metre, will work out at £1·6 billion. The disposal of intermediate-level waste, at £18,000 per cubic metre, will work out at £1·08 billion. Because of the Rolls-Royce method of burial at great depth, used for low-level waste of which there is a vast quantity but which tends to be much lower in radiation, disposal will work out at £1·5 billion. The total bill for disposal of British nuclear waste will be £4·2 billion.

Those are big liabilities, and the policy has largely been to pass them on to customers. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Havant that the road ahead is nuclear, provided that we do not have to experience technological changes that may require a movement of resources. The way ahead, in my view, involves the fast reactor and, ultimately, fusion. But let us take a hard look at the costs and make them clear to the public.

On cost-plus trading, Mr. Harding said in evidence to the Select Committee:

"I am absolutely certain that we will be needing to look at different terms of trading with the privatised National Power, Power Generation and the Scottish boards. We did in fact take some initiative something like two years ago before privatisation was announced to open up discussions."

Why, if negotiations were started two years ago, has so little happened? I appreciate that the contracts cannot be completely renegotiated; that would be too expensive, as paragraph 25 of the report makes clear. On the other hand, if it is open to BNFL to pass on most of its costs, that will not be in the interests of efficiency. I think that BNFL will have regard to that. Unless a complete answer can be found, the flotation will be greatly impeded.

What man will put his money forward for the flotation of, say, National Power if he feels that some of the commitments are so substantial and uncertain that profitability could later be reduced? We considered that question in the Committee stage of the Electricity Bill; indeed, I brought it up myself. It looks as though lavish expenditure will take place well in advance to ensure that the public are safeguarded against financial risk.

I am satisfied that THORP is a great concept. It has ample orders for the next 10 years, and hopes in the years after that to obtain orders from a number of countries in Europe and probably beyond. It will be able to do that only because the plant will be largely paid off and liberal discounts will be possible. But what are the likely prospects for the United Kingdom industry? What organisation in the private sector will build a nuclear power station above 300 MW? We have been told—we were told in Committee—that at least four nuclear power stations are to be built: Sizewell B, which is in the course of construction; Sizewell C, involved in a planning inquiry; Hinkley Point C, which it is hoped will be available in 1998; and Wylfa, each with a capacity of 1,175 MW.

What will happen if the first is built and the second goes ahead? That will mean that we are not replacing the

[Sir Trevor Skeet]

electricity derived from nuclear power. We now have Magnox stations with 4,793 MW and AGRs totalling 5,870 MW. That makes a total of 10,663 MW. But there will have to be some retirements. The Magnox reactors which will be moving out in the 1990s have a capacity of 3,500 MW. Hinkley Point B has a capacity of 1,120 MW, making a total of 4,620 MW. Replacements will be needed, and those replacements will be the new power stations to which National Power is committed, totalling 4,700 MW. If those stations are not produced, there will be no decommissioning or reprocessing at a later date.

I think that the Government have made a big mistake in not keeping the nuclear side in Government hands, where investment could be looked after carefully. I cannot see the private sector building nuclear power stations above 300 MW. I envisage the electricity from nuclear power stations falling from 20 per cent. of the total to between 10 and 15 per cent.

Mr. Maclennan: Earlier, the hon. Gentleman made the welcome assertion that he believed that eventually fast reactors and perhaps even fusion would be the basis of our nuclear programme. Does he base that belief on the expectation that at some stage there will be a change in Government policy? Is that what he is working towards?

Sir Trevor Skeet: I am entirely persuaded that the Government will change their mind later because they will have to do so. If the amount of electricity derived from nuclear sources is to fall, that will mean less work later for THORP. As I said, the whole logic of THORP was the reprocessing of the fuel elements from the newer stations —the advanced gas-cooled reactors and the pressurised water reactors—for two purposes. One was to recycle a waste product, to take out uranium which could be recycled in a way with which we are familiar. The other was to take out the plutonium, not simply to put it into store, but to use it in fast reactors.

What have the Government done? They say that there will be no fast reactors for the next 20 to 30 years and that we do not, therefore, need to spend such amounts on research. Thus one of the biggest planks for THORP has gone, unless it is brought back again.

The Opposition need not be too jocular. Everyone in the United Kingdom is together in fighting the same problem. Some say that the money could be spent on other things, but dispensing with the fast breeder reactor is not in the long-term interests of United Kingdom energy policy or in the interests of the constituency of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who has a local unemployment problem. It is much more important for the United Kingdom that we should carry on with the policy of developing the fast reactor.

We have the possibility of being able to use the plutonium in store, or we can keep the 26 tonnes in there for ever. I dare say a part of it could be used for military purposes, but not from the peaceful purposes stockpile. It was said in evidence to the Select Committee on Energy that it could be used in mixed oxide fuel, but, as has been said before, there is no market for that in the United Kingdom. It is quite unsuitable for AGRs. It may be used for PWRs, but how many will we have here? One is in the course of construction, but it will be some time before the programme materialises. I do not know how many more we shall have. There is no mixed oxide plant in the United Kingdom, although the process is thoroughly understood.

It has also been said that there may be a small European market for such fuel. However, West Germany is nervous about such matters, Sweden intends to close down its industry entirely by the turn of the century, Italy has virtually no nuclear power and although Belgium is a big producer of nuclear power it does not look as though a market will develop there. The Japanese are keen on the method and may use some of their own plutonium in PWRs. I fully support reprocessing because it recycles waste materials. One can draw out uranium and use it again in further fuel charges. One can draw out plutonium and then divert it, as a sensible policy, into fast reactors. One can take out the actinides, turn them into solid compounds and take them out of danger to civilisation. At present, however, we are stockpiling the stuff in large quantities. The report and the Government recommend that some of it should be passed over to National Power. I believe that it should never be passed over to the private sector, but should be under the control and scrutiny of the state. It is right for the defence of the realm that it should be so held.

I shall support the Bill. There are some interesting clauses, such as clauses 2, 3 and 5, which will excite much argument in Committee. The Government are doing a major job, but it behoves me to concentrate on clause 1, which deals with British Nuclear Fuels and is an important aspect of the Bill which may need to be refined. British Nuclear Fuels is a spendid and profitable company. It has great confidence in THORP for the future—far more than I have, even though plant will be written off and there will be heavy discounting to secure more contracts. Through its European connections, it has been securing many valuable contracts and earning foreign exchange. We are told today that it is the biggest earner of yen in this country, which is a signal achievement in itself.

Being able to do well today, however, does not mean that a company will be profitable tomorrow. Technological changes can bring abrupt changes of course which may be disastrous to companies. Let us hope that British Nuclear Fuels has a remarkably good course. It is asking for a further £500 million. Let us hope that it never comes back to the House again for additional money and that it will keep to the ceiling of £2,000 million. The coal industry never fails to come back to the House for more because it is greedy for extra money and once it has received the cash it begins to waste it.

7.56 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I have the advantage of not having to be as generous in my assessment of the management at British Nuclear Fuels and its performance as the hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), whose contribution I admired greatly, as I did the contribution of the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet).

Clause 1 asks the House to approve another £500 million of taxpayers' money being made available to bail out the management of a company which, over the past decade, has regrettably become a haven for smugness, complacency and arrogance, a management encouraged, moreover, by the willingness of successive Ministers

throughout the period to sign virtually open cheques in lieu of that rarest of modern British commodities, hard cash for energy research and development.

I shall give one small but immediate example of the incompetence of the management at British Nuclear Fuels. On page 10 of the minutes of evidence in the report of the Select Committee on Energy, the chairman of BNFL, Mr. Harding, is reported as saying:

"The price of raw uranium moves in a fairly direct relationship with the world price of coal and oil. The fact that both those have come down has brought down with it the price of uranium."

Yet on page 25 of the same report, a memorandum from British Nuclear Fuels in answer to the Committee says:

"BNFL is not aware of any direct links between uranium prices on the one hand and coal or oil prices on the other hand."

Considering the short time lapse between the delivery to the Committee of those two opinions, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the management at BNFL has either undergone one of its sudden and apocalyptic reassessments of operational costs or that its senior managers are not speaking to each other—or perhaps both. Whatever the real reason, it is clear that a lame duck rescue such as the one we are being asked to approve here has encouraged in BNFL an air of smugness instead of vigilance, complacency instead of readiness to respond to the realities of a changing world and arrogance, which derives from the sure knowledge that its cost—plus contracts, which the Central Electricity Generating Board and the South of Scotland electricity board delayed signing until 1982, would cushion it from the real world.

The whole point of BNFL being set up was to recover uranium for thermal reactors and plutonium for fast reactors. As the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North stated most eloquently, recent developments pose serious questions about those aims. Fuel prices, both existing and projected, have therefore played a crucial part in any assessment of BNFL's business. They are a crucial assessment in terms of our judgment of the Bill. If it appears that we in this House judge that traded world uranium prices are unlikely to rise significantly in real terms over the next 20 years, or that our nuclear stations are unlikely to require the service capacity offered by BNFL, or that the much-lauded BNFL foreign contracts are unlikely to prove the kind of bonanza that BNFL tells us they will be, then there is little point in stuffing another £500 million into the mouth of that company.

Perhaps, however, the Government do not care about the odd £500 million. Perhaps they have failed to notice that BNFL's own graph in the Enregy Committee's report shows clearly that, in constant money values—indexed to the starting date of the graph, 1973—uranium ore prices are lower now than they were over 15 years ago, averaging at the moment around $12 to $15 per pound on the spot market. Perhaps they have also failed to notice that for a number of reasons the world's available reserves of uranium yellowcake are ample to meet current and projected demand and highly unlikely to decrease markedly in the foreseeable future.

Part of the reason for low prices and abundance of supply has been the failure of the nuclear industry worldwide to expand as people expected it to expand, in the aftermath of the Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents. In this country we have witnesed that failure of expansion first hand and, with it, the raison d'etre for much of BNFL's operations.

Let us examine for one moment the performance of the advanced gas-cooled reactors—our AGRs that were mentioned by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North and upon which rest so much of the THORP project's hopes and aspirations. The CEGB has four AGR sites —Hinkley, Dungeness, Hartlepool and Heysham. However, a closer examination of that list reveals that only Hinkley B and one of the Dungeness reactors have put any electricity into the national grid. Hinkley is credited with a load factor of just 49·6 per cent. and the Dungeness reactor with a minuscule 1 per cent.—a kind of electronic spasm and a little like the Minister's hand as I imagine him signing the cheques for BNFL, year after year. The other Dungeness reactor is still not working after construction overruns that seem to have lasted decades. The state of the Hartlepool and Heysham reactors is as ropey as ever it was —Hartlepool especially.

So where is all BNFL's business to come from? Is it to come from the Scottish AGRs? Well, it had better, but it is by no means a certainty that it will. The conspicuously un-knighted chairman of the South of Scotland electricity board, Donald Miller, has made his views about BNFL's performance perfectly clear by signalling the premature closure of the Hunterston A station and at the same time by spreading the word that the SSEB's operational profits were nullified by the increased charges that he was forced to pay BNFL under the terms of its cost-plus contracts. Donald Miller's tactics may have given us an insight into the frosty state of relations between the generators and BNFL, but it will not have done his chances of a knighthood much good.

So where is THORP's great future to come from? From its foreign contracts, we are told. But what degree of certainty do we have that even they will prove to be anything other than a means of turning this country into the world's nuclear dustbin? The West Germans, for example, have decided that they do not need a nuclear reprocessing plant, despite the size of their nuclear generating industry. The Wackersdorf reprocessing plant project is being abandoned and there are well-founded rumours that the West Germans will use France's Cap Hague facility and not BNFL's THORP plant at Sellafield for future requirements.

The nuclear generating industries of the United States of America, Canada and Sweden have all decided that they will not go down the road of reprocessing. They have opted for direct storage technologies. The Swedes especially, with a much smaller economy than ours and an electricity supply industry that supplies, proportionately, a much larger amount of electricity to the grid than does ours, have taken some hard and revolutionary decisions that will no doubt make them world leaders in the planning and practice of handling depleted nuclear fuel and waste.

What decisions are we being asked to make in considering the Bill? We are being asked to pour more good money after bad—and for what? So that we can continue to draw upon ourselves the opprobrium of the world for irradiating the Irish sea with Japan's nuclear waste? So that we can continue to find our requests kicked into touch every time we approach a foreign Government about allowing over their territories future flights by BNFL's plutonium-carrying aircraft? What a joy that little procedure has been. The Canadians have indicated their unwillingness. The Governor of Alaska has refused

[Dr. Kim Howells]

permission. I am sure that if polar bears could communicate with BNFL, they would refuse permission, too.

It is hard to imagine any species on earth daft enough to argue that plutonium should be flown from Prestwick to Japan. After the flight has headed north and over the pole, avoiding Iceland, Greenland, Ellesmere island, Alaska and eastern Siberia, of course, it heads south—past the Soviet Kamchatka missile bases and those of Sakhalin and the ones littered along the coast near the huge Vladivostok naval installations—before swooping down towards the Japanese mainland, one of the most densely populated areas on the face of the earth. What an eventful voyage each of those little beauties would have. I can just imagine the Soviet missile commanders not noticing the odd half tonne of plutonium drifting towards them every time there is a high easterly wind blowing in from the Pacific.

Why is BNFL not keen on transporting its plutonium by sea? Is it because it thinks that the Japanese may want it in a hurry when business starts up? That is highly unlikely, I should have thought. I cannot imagine that the Japanese want to manufacture miniature nuclear bombs. One cannot use plutonium for much else if one does not possess a commercial fast breeder reactor, or if one is not prepared to compromise the economics of thermal reactors by running them with some version of a mixed oxide fuel. Knowing the Japanese reputation for business acumen, that is highly unlikely.

Why, therefore, the BNFL proposal to fly it out? I would hazard a guess that it has dreamt it up as a means of cutting costs and of preventing yet another escalation of projected prices. If plutonium is sent by sea, the USA and other nations will demand, as they have already demanded, that it is escorted by an armed vessel that is capable of warding off attacks by hostile nations or terrorists or of aiding a ship that has got into difficulties so that there is no repeat of the tragedy that we have just witnessed in Alaska—but the tragedy of a plutonium escape, not oil.

There are Administrations throughout the world, such as the American Administration, who have become extremely concerned at reports of missing parcels of nuclear fuel and who will continue to insist that, no matter what the financial cost, no more should go missing. It is obvious that the cost of seaborne cargoes will be very high indeed if each one has to be guarded by the Royal Navy or by a privatised version of that service.

BNFL's motives are clear. It favours airborne transportation of fuel because it imagines that it will be cheaper than seaborne transportation. I warn the Minister not to trust BNFL's judgment. Its judgment has not been very good in the past. The accumulated risks and the potential costs of the kind of airborne error that we have witnessed all too often and all too tragically lately will be beyond calculation. BNFL's transportation ventures until now have been far from distinguished. Its peripheral involvement—however innocent it may have been—with the notorious Nukem-Transnuklear affair in West Germany has done nothing to improve its international image, however blameless it may have been over the whole issue.

It is a company that deals in the most dangerous substances known, and particularly in plutonium. Perhaps its plans to rush plutonium away from these shores by air are governed by an overwhelming desire to rid itself of the material as quickly as possible rather than because of Japan's desire to receive it. It already possesses 25 useless tonnes of plutonium at Sellafield. Nobody wants it. After all, what can anyone do with it, except spend millions on storing and guarding the stuff throughout the next millenium? The chairman of National Power does not want it. Mr. Baker's leaked letter makes that perfectly clear.

I have no doubt that the £500 million that we are being asked to underwrite in clause 1 will serve only to encourage BNFL to continue to underuse and waste the enormous reservoir of talent that it has assembled at Sellafield and at its other stations. I urge the Minister to exercise financial prudence, which this Government have done so often over the past 19 years in their administration of our other major energy concerns. For the sake of both common sense and responsible government, he should consider withdrawing clause 1, which provides for this extra funding.

8.10 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I apologise for not having been present for the entire debate and, in particular, for having missed the contributions of the hon. Members for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) and for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet), especially that of the hon. Member for Havant, who was Chairman of the Select Committee that produced the report which is relevant to this debate.

The Minister and the hon. Member for Havant, whose first few words I did hear, described the Bill as technical. As someone who cannot change a light bulb or a plug, or keep his own accounts, I think that the term "technical" is liable to make people like me dive for cover. Actually, there are two different interpretations of the word—it can be used to create two different impressions. The first is that the issue being described is minor and non-political. Clearly, this Bill is not that; it is concerned, in the first clause, with extending the borrowing requirements of the nuclear industry by one third, and with advancing that industry's capability and capacity. If provisions such as clause 1 were not agreed to, the industry would be halted in its development. If the industry could not borrow, it would not be able to live quite as well as is intended.

Then there is the other interpretation of "technical": that matters so described are non-understandable, that the issues are too complex for people such as me, and are understood only by civil servants and accountants and that we should therefore let it go through. But this is clearly not the case, for it is understandable—if not in terms of some of the detail, clearly in terms of the principles involved. At least it provides those of us who do not have a technical bent an opportunity to make some anti-nuclear noises.

The borrowing requirement is to be extended for the thermal oxide reprocessing plant at Sellafield—THORP. Permission for its construction was given in 1978, when it was estimated that the cost would be £300 million. The plant was to come into operation by April 1987. By 1983, the capital costs had risen to £1,280 million, and the start-up was put off until December 1990. BNFL now says that the capital costs will be almost £1,500 million and that the start-up date will be late 1992. Are we sure that the borrowing requirements will not need to be raised? The

record is not inspiring, and as greater account is taken of safety measures, extra costs may be imposed on the industry.

Added to this, although estimates have undoubtedly been partly involved in it, is something that is likely to be extended in the future—decommissioning processes for the whole industry. Paragraph 41 of the report says:

"future potential customers, when placing new reprocessing contracts, can hardly find very attractive the rise of THORP's costs in real terms and the delay in its start up. NII requirements were the principal reason on both accounts. Customers must wonder whether safety requirements in the future will occasion even more delays and cost escalations."

I hope that that will be the case, and that we are becoming more and more safety conscious, for reasons such as those spelled out by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells).

The commercial insurance factor in clause 3 is quite fascinating. What actuarial considerations are involved? "Actuarial" is a technical term, but what we are concerned about are the factors that have to be considered and the chances of various things going wrong. In the context of the nuclear industry, there are the meltdown possibilities, problems of prevailing winds, and problems of airborne disasters, which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd.

If a disaster involving plutonium in transit were to occur in a place such as Malta, which is a small island, it could be disastrous for the whole nation. At present Malta is going for the development of new power station provisions. Thankfully, because it is such a small nation, nuclear power is not financially feasible. If an accident were to occur in such an area, it would devastate not only the island but the whole of the Mediterranean. That consideration must be extended to our own island. Although our area and our population are vastly greater than those of Malta, this is still an island. What liabilities have to be taken into account? What, for instance, about dead sheep? How is the accountancy aspect going to be related to that?

Should we not be putting a brake on nuclear development, given that at present there is a great deal of scientific speculation about nuclear fusion—what methods of fusion can be used, and whether these can take place, for instance, at room temperature? I do not know whether, if we were to be told that it could take place at room temperature, we would give the impression that it was as safe as a front room. Or will we have the same problems as I imagine are associated with the current industry—except that some of the problems of meltdown then begin to disappear?

The hon. Member for Havant criticised press interpretations of the Select Committee's report. It is not surprising that the press has responded to the report in what some people may see as a sensational fashion. Paragraph 46, which deals with the transporting of plutonium to Japan by air or sea, states:

"We are concerned about the proposal to fly plutonium to Japan in future, and especially about the use of Prestwick airport . . . In the wake of the Lockerbie disaster, the consequence of a similar air accident—or terrorist outrage—involving plutonium are too horrific to contemplate."

The movement of toxic, hazardous and nuclear waste across national frontiers and seas, in particular, seems to me to be especially worrying. A nuclear equivalent of the Karin B, oil spills or of the Lockerbie air disaster is well understood by ordinary people. The thinking may be sensational, but there are very good reasons for having sensational considerations of that type very much to the forefront of our minds. We must be worried by provisions in this Bill. They are technical, but they are technical forms of treachery so far as the wellbeing of people is concerned.

8.19 pm

Mr. Barron: I do not intend to delay the House long, but I ought to comment on one or two of the speeches that we have heard.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who is not in his place at the moment, shares with me the view that people are slightly alarmed by the newspaper report about the scuttling of a nuclear submarine. Although I know that the Minister has no departmental responsibility for defence, he may want to comment on that.

The hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) never ceases to amaze me by his support for the nuclear industry. The industry must be terrified every time he gets to his feet. I am even more amazed by his thoughts on low-level nuclear waste. Only a few years ago the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North was a major voice in the "Bedfordshire Says No" campaign when it was proposed to dump nuclear waste in that county. I am told that he led that campaign well. He now says that the Rolls-Royce solution which has increased the cost is not the answer. When the Select Committee on the Environment published its report on that matter, I am not sure that it was totally convinced by the solution. My opinion, for what it is worth, is that it is better than what was happening at Drigg at that time. It is now in concrete trenches in steel boxes and is retrievable if anything goes wrong.

That has increased the cost to BNFL or at least to its customers since most of the contracts are on a cost-plus basis. However, it makes people in that area and in the country in general more confident about the disposal of low-level nuclear waste.

The rest of the speech by the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North consisted of his customary promotion of the flotation of National Power. He pointed out what everybody knows and what will make John Baker and others happy, which is the tie-up of the cost of the nuclear fuel cycle as it is at present.

The hon. Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) and my hon. Friends the Members for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) raised an important question about decommissioning. I should like to ask the Minister about the increased cost of decommissioning. As I understand the information in the report, decommissioning is now the total liability of BNFL and will cost £4·6 billion for the new decommissioning policy. Under the old policy, the total liability was £438 million. As I understand it, most of the costs in the cost-plus contracts are passed on to the customers of BNFL which at present are the CEGB and the foreign companies which are sending waste here.

I am interested to note that that does not deal with the decommissioning of all generators in Britain. It is the cost of decommissioning BNFL's plants, and BNFL has only two generators. Therefore, the decommissioning costs of Magnox and other power stations when they come to the end of their life will be in addition to that £4·6 billion. Therefore, we are talking about a much greater threat to the public purse. I do not expect the Minister to comment on that immediately, but I give him notice that we will

[Mr. Barron]

want to probe that issue further. We will want to discover the total cost of decommissioning Magnox and AGR power stations, and PWR stations if they are fuel-fed in years to come.

The hon. Member for Havant and my hon. Friends mentioned the transportation of plutonium. I understand that it is a major issue in the Prestwick area. I believe that the hon. Member representing that area is the Secretary of State for Defence. In some instances he has no argument about plutonium flying around in airborne craft. I wonder what his position is in relation to the concept of moving tonnes of plutonium to the other side of the world by aircraft flying out of his constituency.

I agree, as I am sure do many others, with the comments made by the hon. Member for Havant about his Committee's feelings on the issue. Perhaps it is an issue on which we should go no further than we have already. However, we still do not have an answer to the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd about what we shall do with the tonnes of reprocessed fuel that we have on our hands now. We are told that a clause in the recent contract says that the waste should return to the country of origin. At present, we have no programme for the movement of that fuel so that we can complete that clause in the contract. It would be interesting to hear the Minister's comments on that.

8.25 pm

Mr. Michael Spicer: In his opening remarks the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) asked whether the Government intend to make a full response to the Select Committee's report. I can confirm that that will be the case. In the meantime, the House might wish me briefly to give our initial answers to some of the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland asked about long-term research. In my opening remarks I said that the Health and Safety Commission will need to sponsor research on its own account to ensure that the totality of research is adequate. Therefore, there will be research independent of the immediate requirements of, for example, the nuclear installations inspectorate doing its safety checks and the research associated with that. There will be ongoing research in parallel with that.

The hon. Gentleman asked about my comments during the Report stage of the Electricity Bill on emergency planning procedures. The Health and Safety Commission has asked the Health and Safety Executive to bring forward regulations which will require local authorities to have plans available for dealing with emergencies at nuclear installations. Those regulations will be made under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 after full consultation with interested bodies. Therefore, an intense consultation process is taking place. It is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to bring the regulations forward. There is a promise that those regulations—GMAH-type regulations—will be brought forward.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the relationship between the Atomic Energy Authority and the private sector, whether there could be an extension of that relationship and why it had not been done in the Bill. That is an extremely difficult issue which poses problems that we are currently considering. It raises the question of how far one can allow a public sector body to trade in the private sector. There are arguments both ways. No doubt we shall tell the House our thoughts when we have considered that matter further.

Mr. Maclennan: I thank the Minister for those answers. Can he give me any idea of the time scale he has in mind for considering that matter?

Mr. Spicer: No, I cannot. Obviously, with the changes that have taken place in the AEA, the issue is likely to be in the front of our minds when we think about its future. It would be implicit in the changes that are taking place in the organisation as a result of the various decisions we have taken in the past few months.

The theme of the debate was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd), the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and particularly by the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells). In the context of the additional finance limits for which the Bill makes provision, the hon. Member for Pontypridd said that the Bill represented a lame-duck rescue. I do not think that he could have been in the Chamber when I said that BNFL has been consistently profitable since its inception, had paid dividends over the last 12 years and aims to pay off all its borrowings by the mid-1990s. He made a comparison with the coal industry. I only wish that it was a true comparison, because, if that were the position facing the coal industry, a lot of our problems, certainly with respect to the coal industry, would not exist. It was a speech that was unusual for the hon. Gentleman. It was full of hyperbole and not, I think, fully worthy of him.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman did not like it.

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has just rushed into the Chamber and is coming to the defence of the coal industry. It is not a question of not liking it; I was not passing a value judgment on it. It was factually inaccurate to talk about a lame-duck rescue. The hon. Member for Bolsover backs his hon. Friend's judgment no doubt because he shares his prejudices. The hon. Member for Bolsover is full of prejudices; he is riddled with them. Therefore, it is wholly unproblematic that he would support his hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd's prejudices. I am not surprised that he backs his hon. Friend against me. In fact, I would be rather unhappy if the hon. Member for Bolsover's prejudices were on my side.

I turn now to the question of costs at BNFL because undoubtedly there have been cost overruns in the past. I concede that to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant, who particularly raised this point, but I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) also raised it. Because of cost-plus contracts, the effect of these overruns has been the almost automatic increase in prices paid by the CEGB; and because of the monopolistic position of the CEGB in the market place it has in turn been able to pass these cost increases straight through to the electricity consumer.

With the passage of the Electricity Bill—which is relevant in this context, Madam Deputy Speaker—all this will change. The privatised successor companies to the CEGB will no doubt wish to put far greater pressure on BNFL when contracts are struck between them for further

reprocessing and related work. What is more, these contracts will be fixed price in nature. BNFL will therefore be under pressure to continue the process of tightening the control by its management of the vast capital projects in which it is currently engaged. And, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North, the Government will ensure that the contracts finally signed are fair as between BNFL and the electricity supply industry. It will be a difficult operation, I concede.

Sir Trevor Skeet: I am heartened by this. These will be fixed price contracts from now on. From what date will this be so? They will not antecede the current date covering the past? This is where the generating companies could fall into difficulties.

Mr. Spicer: The practice of entering fixed price contracts has already been started, so they are nothing new. All I am telling my hon. Friend and the House is that, particularly as the ESI prepares for privatisation, the contracts it will need to strike for its reprocessing arrangements will in all probability be on the basis of fixed prices.

Mr. Barron: I think that the Minister has nearly answered my question, but I want to ask it again. What the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) is asking and what I am asking is this: is the Minister saying that any fuel that is currently under the old cost-plus contract signed for reprocessing will be moved to a new contract with the flotation of the electricity supply industry?

Mr. Spicer: If what I say now is wrong, I will certainly write to the hon. Gentleman about it. The answer really depends on the precise terms of the contracts, I suspect. I do not think it will be possible simply to renegade on the existing contracts; they will be part of the assets and liabilities of the successor company.

Mr. Skinner: Renegade? Does he not mean renege?

Mr. Spicer: The hon. Member for Bolsover is on form this evening. I fully concede that he is absolutely right; I used the wrong word at that point. I hope that will be the only point on which I shall have to agree with him for the rest of the evening.

I have to say in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Havant that the rise in unit prices in BNFL's main businesses over the past three years amounted to less than 7 per cent. annually for enrichment, were virtually nil for Magnox fuel manufacture and were 8·5 per cent. annually for reprocessing. In fact, AGR fuel prices decreased between 1984 and 1987.

As to the cost increases in the THORP project, increased costs of £200 million to a total of £1·8 billion were due to a requirement to meet more rigorous safety standards and to escalations arising from a delay of over two years in the project. BNFL has now carried out a major review of the THORP project and is increasingly confident of its ability to complete the plant within the latest costs estimate. The first stage receipt and storage facility is now on stream and the main plant is on schedule for completion in 1992.

As to the anxieties which have been expressed by, in particular, the hon. Member for Pontypridd but also by my hon. Friend's Committee about THORP's long-term business prospects, all I can say is that I would not mind having a business which had 10 years' profitable contracts in the bag amounting to some £4 billion. As the House knows, by far the largest component of these contracts is contracts with Japan, which amount to around £2 billion and will make THORP the largest earner of yen in the country. The Japanese contracts are even contributing to the present development of THORP, which will have been fully written off by the time the first 10-year contracts come to an end.

I turn next to the second major point which has been recurring throughout this short but, I think the House will agree, interesting debate, the question of the significant misrepresentation which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Havant has acknowledged, has been given to the Committee's report on the question of the dumping of foreign nuclear waste in this country.

All contracts, for the reprocessing of spent fuel signed since 1976 have contained clauses for the return of waste. Nowhere in the report is it suggested that the pre-1976 contracts should be renegotiated. They were freely entered into and it would be impossible for any Government to step in now and attempt to get them amended retrospectively. Paragraph 30 of the report of the Committee has been particularly misrepresented in this context. The report talks specifically of waste from 1,500 tonnes of spent fuel as being the result of pre-1976 contracts. In the newspapers this morning this has become 1,500 tonnes of waste. In fact, 97 per cent. of this is recovered in the form of uranium and plutonium. About 100 cu m of high-level waste—that is, as said earlier, about two bus loads, which is rather different from the 1,500 tonnes mentioned in the press today—will arise from the reprocessing. This is less than one tenth of the expected high-level waste arising to the year 2000. The vast majority of the billions of pounds of business which lies ahead will be subject to the condition that the waste is returned to the country of origin.

Turning to another set of questions, about decommissioning, which hon. Gentlemen have raised during the course of the debate, a question was raised in particular —I think by the hon. Member for Rother Valley—about the wisdom or otherwise of leaving nuclear plant for a long period after it has been shut down before it is removed. Our primary concern is always to ensure that nuclear plant, whether operating or closed down, is safe in terms of both men and the environment. I will come to the specific question about the triggering of schedule 12 to the Bill in a moment, but there is no doubt that it is technically possible to decommission plant on a much shorter time scale than the industry at present plans. Indeed, we are demonstrating this with the Windscale AGR. However, the difficulties of doing that are considerable. In any reasonable commercial terms, it makes much more sense to leave dismantling work until radioactive decay makes it easier to meet required standards of worker and environmental protection.

The NII and the various authorities are quite clear that 100 years is the best period. Were somebody suddenly to impose a new regulation upon the industry to carry out the third stage of decommissioning sooner, it is quite possible that the provisions of schedule 12 might be triggered off and implemented.

The Select Committee made the interesting suggestion that the companies legislation should be amended to make decommissioning costs the first charge in the event of

[Mr. Spicer]

liquidation. I certainly cannot be expected to make an immediatc response to that suggestion today, but I have noted it.

Sir Ian Lloyd: Have the Government received what my hon. Friend would describe as a convincing and complete explanation of the vast difference between the two figures which I gave, the original figure of £468 million and the current figure of £4,600 million?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend was the Chairman of the Select Committee which recommended that the definition of "decommissioning" should be changed from plant on site to a return to a green field site. That redefinition of what was implicit in decommissioning has been a major reason behind the escalation in the provisions for decommissioning which BNFL is now making for its plants. My hon. Friend may have to pursue that point.

Several questions have been raised about the ownership, control and transportation of plutonium after privatisation. I assure the House that the privatisation of the electricity supply industry will make no difference to existing strict controls which govern the ownership and use of all civil materials. Plutonium and other nuclear materials will continue to be subject to Euratom safeguards and the terms of the United Kingdom-Euratom-IAEA safeguards agreement. Reports on plutonium production are supplied to the safeguards authorities by the reactor operators when the irradiated fuel is sent to reprocessing plants. Further reports are made at each stage as the plutonium works its way through the nuclear cycle.

Those procedures are administered by Euratom, whose safeguards inspectors have access at all times to the facilities in question to check that the reports are correct. The present restrictions on the transfer of nuclear material abroad will also continue after privatisation. Civil plutonium can be transferred abroad only on assurances covering its peaceful use, physical protection and controls on retransfer, and it will remain subject to the safeguards arrangements that I have already mentioned.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Who is to pay for the storage of plutonium? The companies cannot use it. Mixed oxide fuels are not used in the United Kingdom. Plutonium will be stored somewhere.

Mr. Spicer: When I refer to ownership, I may implicitly answer my hon. Friend's question. The hon. Member for Rother Valley also referred to ownership. I stress that it is normal international practice for generators of nuclear power to own the products of their reactors. Therefore, it becomes their responsibility and their cost. At present, plutonium derived from United Kingdom generating boards' fuel is stored at Sellafield, and that is likely to continue to be the practice after privatisation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Havant and the hon. Member for Pontypridd were particularly forceful about transportation. I will draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to the comments that have been made.

Nuclear materials in transit are subject to very rigorous international safety standards and regulations laid down by the International Atomic Energy Agency. Those international regulations require substantial safety margins to be built into containers so that they can withstand even the severest accident without causing a significant public hazard. A recent study by the advisory committee on the safe transport of radioactive materials concluded that the safety and security risks in transporting nuclear materials were negligible. BNFL and other nuclear operators have been transporting nuclear materials, including plutonium, safely and securely for over 30 years.

I re-emphasise that the Government are committed to retaining nuclear power to provide essential diversity in fuel supplies. The Government's proposals for electricity privatisation should secure a healthy future for BNFL, at least until the end of the century. BNFL's prospects in the longer term will depend on how competitive it can make the services it offers, including reprocessing. The Select Committee's report is relevant in that context. Negotiations are currently under way between the company and the generating boards on new fixed price trading arrangements. That will undoubtedly mean increased risks for BNFL, but it will enable the company to reap the benefits of improvements in efficiency and revised work practices which it is introducing.

From the Government's point of view, it has been an interesting debate. We shall further consider the technical and detailed points and certainly give full attention to the Select Committee's report, which reached us only yesterday.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of bills).

ATOMIC ENERGY BILL [LORDS] [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Atomic Energy Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State;

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund; and

(3) any increase in the sums payable under any other enactment out of money provided by Parliament or out of the National Loans Fund or in the sums so payable into the Fund or the Consolidated Fund, being an increase attributable to any provision of the Act substituting a financial limit of £2,000 million for that imposed by section 2(1) of the Nuclear Industry (Finance) Act 1977 in relation to British Nuclear Fuels plc.—*[Mr. Michael Spicer.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1989, which were laid before this House on 23rd March, be approved.

That the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1989, which were laid before this House on 23rd March, be approved.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

Question agreed to.

Namibia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

8.47 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The House has an opportunity tonight to debate Namibia, at a critical time for that war-torn and long-suffering country, when the outcome of debates such as this is important, not only in the House but in the Houses of Parliament of permanent members of the Security Council who hold the fate of Namibia in their hands. The outcome of such debates will determine the concerns at the end of the road on which Namibia has been set under resolution 435. The debate is important when we have seen waged a battle which has not only included the usual combatants—soldiers, guerrillas, troop carriers and guns—but is also very much about public relations. South Africa has waged a relentless public relations war against SWAPO. It is important that we should think of the human casualties and consequences of what is happening in that country.

I have in mind a young boy whom I and my German parliamentary colleague, Professor Dr. Klaus Osswalld, who recently travelled with me to Namibia, saw in the military base-airport—for it is both—of Oshikati. That little boy did odd jobs and ran errands and, by that means, supported himself, his parents and his grandparents—a whole extended family—in that region which, of late, has come to be entirely dependent for its economy on the presence of the military. The old traditional basis of Ovamboland's economy has all but disappeared and the area has become absorbed in the great military battle that is taking place in that area.

The little boy supported his extended family by running errands for the soldiers who guarded the airport—perhaps getting them a cold coke from the only refrigerator for miles around—and they would give him the odd cent or two and, during the course of the day, doing such little jobs as he could, he would collect sufficient rand to meet his needs and those of that whole family, who no longer had their land, their traditional means of support, to sustain them.

I wonder as we discuss Namibia what has happened to that little boy and his family in Ovamboland, in an area of the country which has become in certain parts a free fire area for the South African defence force. One suspects, if the little boy is still there, that he is making more rand than ever because of the extent of troop movements in the area and the many hundreds of troops now based around the airport there. He is probably still running errands for them, if he is there and if he has the heart—bearing in mind what might have happened to his family—to continue his efforts.

As we debate this issue, we must have in the forefront of our minds the future of that young boy and his family. What sort of future will he have in an independent Namibia? While it is important for us to consider current events and what led up to them, our major task must be to ensure that we move forward steadily and with resolution to the satisfactory implementation of resolution 435. We must build up in Namibia an economic and political infrastructure brought about as a result of free and fair elections. Such an infrastructure must be capable of maintaining, supporting and developing a non-racial democracy in that country. That will prove that there is another way, a real alternative to apartheid South Africa, the nation on which Namibia will inevitably have to rely for some time for much of its needs if its economy is to survive.

We have an opportunity in Namibia to create a showcase for the people of South Africa, to show them what life can be like after apartheid. That is why it is vital for us to get it right. But we must be under no illusions about the forces that are working against such a peaceful settlement and the existence of that type of showcase.

I do not want to dwell tonight on what has happened in the past, but the version of events that has been put out by South Africa in recent days—the version of events that, I am afraid, has been reflected here in the utterances of the Prime Minister in replying to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston)—gives cause for concern. It is not enough to pillory SWAPO over the events of 1 April and what has happened subsequently—to put SWAPO in the dock and blind oneself to the reality of what the South Africans have been doing. Mistakes have undoubtedly been made on all sides, but South Africa cannot be proud of its role in this matter. Indeed, its role is worthy of condemnation by the international community.

We saw in the recent events in Ovamboland what was almost the inevitable result of a process that has never sought to include SWAPO in the decision-making. To this day—the recent meeting on Mount Etjo was an example of this—the process has not treated SWAPO as an equal party that must be consulted and involved in decisions about the future of that country.

We are seeing the consequences of not involving SWAPO, of a peace process that all too often has been based on protocols, conventions and understandings which are not formulated in one place, along with resolution 435. It is not possible to put one's hand on a bundle of documents and say, "This is the peace plan and this is what is to happen." The United Nations has not been able to do that, and it seems that nobody is able to look at the whole body of protocols and so on in a combined way, thereby creating the peace plan building on resolution 435. Hence, it is a flaky and nebulous agreement in too many ways, and we should not be surprised at what happened.

The version of events given by South Africa cannot be accepted without critical analysis, and that analysis must be based on what we hear and on eye witness accounts of what took place on the ground on 1 April. Those accounts deserve more credence than they have been given. I give an example from a witness of the churches in Namibia. He is from the Evangelical Lutheran church based in Ovamboland. He reported on an incident which occurred about 35 km north of Ongwediva.

Christian pastors who moved into the area shortly after the events I am describing came across five children. Children are the greatest victims of the struggle, not only in Namibia but throughout southern Africa. We must have special regard for them as victims because they are completely innocent, whatever their parents or relatives might be or might have done.

Those five children told of how they had to flee from the bullets, as they described it, and spend the night hiding in a bush. They took the delegation to a site where evidence of fighting was found. The delegation found blood and traces of bodies that had been dragged along the ground. They found items of equipment and foodstuff. They

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

interviewed civilian eye witnesses, one of whom told of how he had spoken to a man—one of a group of 50 men, he said—who told him that they were from SWAPO and that they were regrouping and had not come there to fight. The witness said that while they were speaking he heard the sound of approaching Casspirs, meaning armoured troop carriers. He said that the guerrilla told him to run away.

This is what the witness said then followed:

"All of a sudden people were fleeing, bullets were flying, and the guerrillas took cover. The people who shot first were the SADF"—

that is, the South African defence force. That was the evidence of one eye witness who saw men being fired on, initially by the South African defence force. Those men sought to defend themselves and fired back. The men had not gone there for the purposes of engaging in or renewing a war, but to establish bases and to surrender to the UNTAG troops.

The evidence of that witness was to be repeated in a variety of incidents throughout Ovamboland. One must give that sort of witness some credence. It is no use dismissing it as SWAPO propaganda, as unreliable and not to be believed. We must weigh such evidence in the balance and we must then say, as all fair-minded and honest people do say, that there is some doubt and more than a question about whether SWAPO was there for any belligerent purpose. Indeed, the United Nations Secretary-General made it clear that it was not possible to say that SWAPO were the belligerents in this matter.

However, when the Prime Minister came hot-foot from Namibia to answer questions in the House, she gave the impression to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber that it ws all SWAPO's fault, that they were the ones to blame. In so doing, she lent credence to the South African regime and to its version of events. She provided it with a massive public relations coup, which it has been seeking to exploit ever since.

The Prime Minister must understand when she goes about her travels that she cannot hope to be perceived in the world or in Africa as the midwife of Namibian independence while she continues to act as if she were the wetnurse of apartheid. The two are inconsistent. If the Prime Minister cares about the future of Namibia—one must hope and pray that she does care—it is absolutely vital that she seeks to be, and is, even-handed between the parties.

One does not for one moment suggest that the Minister of State has been anything other than even-handed, but it is for the Prime Minister to give a lead in these matters and we are entitled to look to her for that lead. Only then will Britain be able to play a role in the resolution of this conflict and ensure that we fulfil our responsibilities not only in the Security Council, but our historic role and responsibilities in that part of Africa, which are real, great and heartfelt. We have a role to play and we must play it to the full.

But be that as it may, current events have cast a massive doubt on the sincerity of South Africa's commitment to the peace process. We have read today in the newspapers about massive gatherings of troops outside those areas where SWAPO guerrillas have been told to surrender their arms. Once again, the authorities have turned to the churches for support and have asked them to provide places where people will feel safe to gather. However, the churches have reported today that gatherings of South African soldiers close to the churches have deterred SWAPO guerrillas from going there, as inevitably they would. When one hears the news today from OXFAM representatives in the area that a South African base was established 40 yards away from an assembly point, and that a South African soldier stood at the entrance to an UNTAG assembly point, can one be surprised that the number of SWAPO guerrillas who have surrendered is as small as it is? We have also been told today that four SWAPO soldiers, who presented themselves to a Finnish Lutheran mission at Oniipa, told the mission that they did so because they did not feel able to go to the United Nations assembly points without the missionaries' protection because approaching those points was too dangerous.

That is the reality of what is happening now and it does not say much for the bona fides of the Administrator-General, Mr. Piennaar, who now maintains that he was misunderstood, that SWAPO guerrillas should be interrogated at the time of their surrender and before their removal to Angola. But interrogated by whom? The answer is, by SWAPOL, the South-West African police force. Recently I asked the Minister of State at Foreign and Commonwealth Office Question Time to give us some assurances on this. Clearly, she could not do so then, but I hope that she will be able to tonight. It is believed that up to half the members of that force are former members of Koevoet, which is Afrikaans for crowbar, a notorious, cruel and inhumane paramilitary counter-insurgency unit, which was supposed to be disbanded under resolution 435 but which, it would seem, has been integrated into the ordinary police force of the territory.

Yet SWAPO guerrillas are supposed to surrender themselves for interrogation by those people. It beggars belief that that can be the basis of any genuine peace or trust between the parties in this conflict. We need a practical assurance on the role of SWAPOL and Koevoet within it—and on that of battalion 101. At one stage in the debacle that followed the events of 1 April, when UNTAG was caught unequipped and unprepared in terms of its military numbers and any form of strategy—we are told that its members did not even know how to contact SWAPO because the lines of communication did not exist—the number of UNTAG forces in the region was such that things came to such a pass that it was necessary to use battalion 101 to police the conflict. Battalion 101 is another hated and loathed offshoot of the South African army.

None of that inspires trust or confidence. It does not hold out any hope for a lasting peace or for a smooth and steady transition, through the electoral process, to ultimate independence. We want some signs of the bona fides of the Administrator-General and South Africa in this matter. South West Africa territory force members should be confined to their bases and UNTAG should be increased to such a level that it can be relied upon to police the settlement.

The situation demands a re-evaluation of the Security Council's initial response to the requests from the Secretary-General for 7,500 soldiers to form part of UNTAG instead of the 4,650 that he was ultimately allocated. That allowed a saving of $284 million in a budget which was cleared only on 1 March. When, on 31

March, my German parliamentary colleague and I asked when the force would be operational, the director of the special representative's office, Mr. Cedric Thornberry, said that it would take six weeks.

There is a clear argument for increasing the forces at the disposal of the special representative and we look to the British Government to give the clearest possible indication that that is the line which we should be pursuing in the Security Council. Someone must make that demand and we look to this Government to make it. That demand is eminently reasonable and vital if we are to move in the right direction.

We need those assurances from the Government and we look to the Minister of State to provide them to the House and to the country tonight. However, we must also reflect on what we expect UNTAG to do. We must reflect on what we expect those men, women and soldiers to do in Namibia and what we expect the dedicated international civil servants to deliver. We must consider what attitude and approach is required of them in the implementation of resolution 435.

We can envisage no way forward in that territory which requires UNTAG to perform a reactive role or to act simply as a court of appeal, distanced from the hurly-burly and day-to-day resolution of conflict, without a hands-on approach which is proactive as well as reactive. If the special representative, Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, does not adopt that approach, UNTAG will not have the confidence of the people and it will be obliged to rely on the Administrator-General, Lois Piennar, for support and assistance.

How can we ask the United Nations in Namibia to perform the task which the international community has set it, namely to take Namibia out of the clutches of apartheid and from the control of South Africa, using the same office which for all these years has kept Namibia in the thrall of apartheid? That is not on. There must be a willingness to be proactive and get out and actively engage in the issues and resolution of conflict which will inevitably present themselves daily to the parties in Namibia given the difficulty and delicacy of the task.

I hope that all hon. Members appreciate the delicacy and difficulty of the position in Namibia. We are not talking about Zimbabwe, or Rhodesia, where Britain had sole responsibility and where there was a governor-general of the calibre and quality of Lord Soames. We must also recognise that unless we adopt the words "control" and "supervision" which relate to the electoral process contained in resolution 435 and become concerned not simply with supervision but with control, it will not be possible to move Namibia through the electoral process to independence. There must be resources and the political will to control the situation and come out from under the wings of the Administrator-General. That is vital for the confidence of the people in UNTAG and for the resolution of the conflict.

Let us consider the task which Mr. Ahtisaari set himself when he arrived on 31 March. He detailed what he described as the essential preparations. First of all, he said:

"All Namibian political prisoners and detainees, wherever they are held, must be set free."

That is a requirement of resolution 435. However, there is an immediate problem there. I have met lawyers involved in human rights cases in Namibia and I have met representatives from the Churches responsible for ministering to the families of detainees.

I have been told—and I believe this to be true—that there are no lists of detainees giving details of where those people are being held or who they are. The Administrator-General does not know how many people are detained and he is not aware of how many are detained by the South African security forces which are not directly answerable to the Administrator-General in their operations. There will be some detainees in South Africa and some in Namibia. The United Nations must meet the lawyers, Churches and other groups working with prisoners in order to compile a list.

No such meeting had taken place by 31 March. If we are waiting for the Administrator-General to deliver up those people, that would show an optimism about the good faith of the Administrator-General which simply is not justified. There is a need for a sufficiently resourced team to set about that work in a way that does not cause it to have to rely on the Administrator-General.

Mr. Ahtisaari said that those in exile

"must have the chance to come here, to their native land."

I visited the director of the RRR committee which is a partner organisation of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Namibia. That committee is responsible for the reception, resettlement and rehabilitation of those people—that is what the three RRRs stand for. It had not received a penny from the UNHCR. It relies entirely on money from the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. The RRR committee is not a great organisation. It consists of a small group of Church people from the denominations in Namibia who are seeking to provide the infrastructure for those three aspects of the process—reception, resettlement and rehabilitation.

I urge the Government and the Minister of State to make urgent representations to our ambassador at the United Nations to make sure that we put pressure on UNHCR to deliver the money now. We are talking about movements of people, the numbers of which can vary. Estimates range from 40,000 to 80,000, but it is thought that a realistic figure is between 58,000 and 68,000. Many of those people are children under the age of 11 who leave the camps but have no schools to attend.

Where are the returning people to live? There are already problems about accommodation, and huge infrastructure problems will hit that country in the next few months. The timetable is clear and says that by mid-May, which is just a month away, refugees and detainees should begin to return to Namibia. At this time the infrastructure needed to receive them is not in place. We need to give aid now for that process. We must not take the view that we should wait and see until independence. We need to get in there now.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, not least because I committed the discourtesy of missing much of what he has said. He mentioned a matter which I raised in a recent parliamentary question. I support the basic principle that there should be additional infrastructure support for Namibia before the independence process reaches its conclusion.

Mr. Boateng: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. His intervention is a sign of the way in which these issues unite all strands of opinion in the House. This is not a matter of party political controversy and I am sure that the Minister of State will take that on board.

[Mr. Boateng]

The need is there now and we cannot afford to wait, because if we do massive harm will be caused to the country and its people. The special representative went on to say:

"Laws which could interfere with free and fair elections will be abolished."

In Namibia a huge edifice of discriminatory law of one sort or another has been created. It is designed to break up the country into various ethnic homelands of one kind or another. There are 13 different ethnic education authorities, each with responsibility for an ethnic group. That is a totally unworkable and bizarre system, but the matter goes beyond that to a law designed to stifle the free dissemination of information and expression of opinion under the Police Act and various Defence Acts.

I was concerned to discover that two of the leading lawyers that I met in Windhoek were not aware of any member of the legal profession or anybody concerned with human rights in Namibia who had been consulted by the United Nations about identifying those laws. Is the United Nations to rely once again on the Administrator-General, the very person who put those laws in place and who has been administering them all this time? Will he be asked to detect and identify the laws? That stretches the bounds of credibility, but that is not all.

While I was in Namibia, two days before 1 April Gwen Lister, the editor of *The Namibian*, and Anton Labowsky, a distinguished trade unionist and lawyer, were summoned under the Police Act for disseminating information about security forces two years before. The summonses were issued under one of the laws that will have to be repealed after 1 April, and the same Administrator-General who is apparently to be relied upon to identify and repeal those laws issued the summonses. He did that to stifle, suppress and hold back Gwen Lister and Anton Labowsky during the course of the independence process.

We cannot rely on the bone fides of such a man and the United Nations and UNTAG must be empowered and emboldened to take a stance that will enable them to draw on all available sources of information and action to bring about the repeal of those laws. Without such repeal it will be impossible to move to a successful settlement.

We are all agreed that there must be an end to violence and intimidation from whatever source. We addressed that matter earlier in the debate. Such violence and intimidation are never acceptable but we know the difficulties about containing them because they were experienced in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. But it must be done. Every political party, whatever its belief, must have a chance freely and fairly to put its case to the people.

While I was in Namibia I met Church men, laity and people who are active in the political process and people who are not. They all expressed concern that there would be difficulties unless UNTAG had people on the ground and until the United Nations was able to disseminate free, fair and impartial information. As in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, we need United Nations information vans to tell the people the truth. We cannot rely on the South West Africa Broadcasting Corporation or on the overwhelming majority of the printed press in that country to do that. Most of the media has clearly taken sides, and that was clear simply by watching television even if one could not understand every word. There is a heavily biased media in favour of South Africa and its interests.

I met one pastor who gave me personal testimony about the army going into the schools and seeking to explain to the children the meaning of resolution 435. When a headmaster called on the Church to come in and explain and to put its view, the Church did not even have a professional video unit. It is not rich in the resources needed to explain and to convey information. It is desperately crying out to the international community for such resources, and one hopes that that cry will be heard. When the pastor went to that school, someone from the local education authority came in and challenged the headmaster and said, "Why are you asking this Church man to explain resolution 435 to the children? Why have you not asked a member of the defence force?"

I have no reason to doubt stories that I heard of South African army personnel going from village to village, ripping the shirts off villagers who supported SWAPO and requiring them to wear DTA shirts, or of army personnel going from village to village carrying pictures of Ethiopia and saying to the villagers, "If you vote for SWAPO, this is what will happen to your country." The telegrams from Oxfam representatives and the fax information from the churches in Namibia show that that is happening now. It is not a figment of SWAPO propaganda; it is the truth. There has to be an answer and a counter to that. I hope that the Minister will ensure that we put the case for an enhanced information presence amongst the UNTAG forces in the Security Council in the days and months ahead.

I hope, too, that the Minister will recognise the extent to which already the election campaign is being fought in Namibia by those who have the closest possible connection with South Africa. It must be said that the DTA is South Africa's surrogate. No one believes for a moment—certainly South Africa does not believe—that anyone other than SWAPO will win the election. After all, SWAPO has been the flag carrier of independence and has been at the forefront of the armed struggle. The people know why they have the prospect of independence. In Namibia they will no more vote for the DTA and its allies than the people of Zimbabwe did for Bishop Muzorewa. People are not that gullible. They will vote for SWAPO.

What South Africa seeks to ensure, by fair means or foul, is that SWAPO will not get two thirds majority necessary for it effectively to write the constitution. That is the concern of South Africa. That is why it is waging a massive propaganda war and why it sought to use the Prime Minister in the way that it did, both at Windhoek and subsequently in the House when she gave the answer that she did to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber. The hon. Gentleman was told that all the information would be available to him and that he should read what the Secretary-General had said. Then it emerged that the Secretary-General's statement was confidential and was not available. I have news for the House—it is available, and as from tonight it will be in the Library. I have a copy here and I will put it in the Library. It shows that the Secretary-General made it crystal clear that it was not possible to say that SWAPO had an offensive intent. The whole House will be able to see the document in the Library later tonight because it is right that it should be in the public domain.

That is all part and parcel of the campaign of misinformation and the attempt to manipulate the media and the political process that are being fuelled and funded by South Africa. I saw it with my own eyes when I

attended the beginning and end of the DTA rally in Windhoek on 1 April. It was an interesting experience. The comparison with the SWAPO rally, which I also attended, is worth making. The DTA rally was to take place at a ground which had been chosen as an act of provocation —immediately adjacent to the ground that SWAPO had originally chosen—but SWAPO withdrew because there was a danger of violence if the two rallies took place side by side.

The DTA rally took place on a ground that was well equipped with pavilions and tents. It had a massive stage and a huge amplification system. The SWAPO rally, on the other hand, took place without any tents or pavilions. The SWAPO leadership and speakers spoke from the back of a van. Even my local party would not have been happy with the communications system. Nevertheless, the SWAPO rally attracted about 25,000 people, while the DTA attracted only about 6,000. That is the difference between the two parties on the ground. It is interesting that the DTA should attract so few people, despite all that expenditure, which included a horse show. The DTA is noted for its horse shows, which are used to draw people in. I also witnessed the free distribution of shirts at the start of the DTA meeting. One wishes that one's own party were in a position to throw T-shirts off the back of a lorry, as the DTA did to reward people for attending that rally.

Free transport was also provided. SWAPO members in Windhoek told me that they had come down from the hinterland in free transport provided by the DTA. They boarded the van and then changed their T-shirts once they arrived at Windhoek. However, it was not just a matter of handing out free T-shirts at the beginning of the rally. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I should not have believed it, but the DTA also handed out corned beef at the end of the meeting. If one attended from the beginning, one had the chance of a free T-shirt, but if one stayed to the end —not always easy to do on any political occasion—there was a can of corned beef as well. Should there be any doubt about that, I have photographs of the corned beef being distributed and carried away. I took those photographs myself, when I attended the end of the DTA rally that afternoon. They show Herero ladies in beautiful costumes based on Victorian and German costumes of the period, smiling and waving, and carrying away their cans of corned beef. Although I took those photographs myself, I think that they should be deposited in the Library so that right hon. and hon. Members have evidence of the corned beef reward for those who withstood the DTA's rhetoric. They will therefore be placed in the Library with the Secretary-General's report for Members of Parliament and other interested persons to examine.

The question that must and will be asked by those concerned with the peace process in Namibia is where the beef lies in the resolution and determination of UNTAG to see that process through, and in the resolution and determination of the Security Council to provide the means and the resources to achieve that. It is no use simply blaming UNTAG. The fact remains that all too often UNTAG finds its hands tied by a lack of resolution and of will on the part of the Security Council. The challenge to the House and to the international community is to put the beef into the peace process, and in so doing to give that little boy in Oshikati and the rest of his family in Ovamboland, together with all the other little boys and girls in Namibia and their families throughout that territory, the chance, hope and opportunity to enjoy a peaceful transition out of the bonds of apartheid and into the international community as a non-racial democracy within the Commonwealth. That is what they want. We have seen the trust of the people of Namibia betrayed in the past. We must not be a party to their betrayal in the future.

9.40 pm

Mr. Michael Knowles (Nottingham, East): I thank the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) for his courtesy in allowing me to speak in what is very much his debate. It is kind of him to let someone else speak, particularly when he knows that I shall not agree with everything that he said. It is partly a product of our system I agreed with and can accept that much of what he said, but inevitably I shall concentrate on the issues on which I disagree.

The hon. Member for Brent, South was absolutely right about the personal tragedies—especially that of the small boy in Namibia. It is a tragedy for any small boy caught in such a war anywhere—be it Namibia, or anywhere else in Africa, in Afghanistan or in central America. Little more than a generation ago it was also true of many young children on this continent. That is always the effect of warfare. A bloody guerrilla war has been going on for a long time in Namibia, and the hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to the fact that South African forces undoubtedly bear this in mind.

Nevertheless, I find it hard to accept the hon. Gentleman's version of 1,800 SWAPO guerrilla troops straying across the border and practically carrying election literature and ballot boxes. That does not seem likely and I know from accounts from Namibia that, even according to the kindest of interpretations, it did not happen in that way.

I can well believe that SWAPO thought that it should be an equal partner in the agreements, but it was not—and deliberately so. The agreements were between outside powers. SWAPO is now one party among many standing for election. It is not the sole representative of the Namibian people. If that were so, an election would not be necessary. The African National Congress stance on South Africa comes to mind that all that need to be discussed are the modalities of the transfer of power. However, SWAPO has to compete with other political parties in the election market.

Mr. Hunter: The hon. Member for Brent, South said that chance, hope and opportunity were what the Namibian people should be given, as should all people of southern Africa. Will my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) extend his argument to include or expand the proposition that SWAPO is not the vehicle to give chance, hope and opportunity when it so manifestly abuses the peace process that is being implemented?

Mr. Knowles: My hon. Friend must bear with me. I can believe that many individuals among the SWAPO troops were under the misapprehension that they could return to Namibia, and some paid a high price—indeed, the ultimate price—for that misapprehension. Who issued the orders to them? Eighteen hundred troops do not cross a border in such a solid way by chance or misapprehension. It was a deliberate move and the higher command of SWAPO must have issued the orders.

Mr. Hunter: Perhaps it was Nujoma.

Mr. Knowles: It may well have been Nujoma.

At the last count I saw 42 parties were to run in the elections, although I expect that it will boil down to six or seven. One advantage that Namibia has, and will have when it becomes independent, is that its black politicians have been in place for a long time, so when it gains independence it will not be a direct transition from colonialism. The fact that there are black administrators who run large enterprises will be an advantage. As the hon. Member for Brent, South knows, there is a considerable infrastructure in Namibia, including road networks and industries. The cost of the war has been appalling, but there is much left on which to build.

The difficulty with the Council of Churches in Namibia is that it is often seen, whether fairly or unfairly, as a mouthpiece for SWAPO. The point has been made that we need much more aid for Namibia, especially to back up the democratic processes. It was pointed out, for instance, that there was not enough money for the UNHCR.

My right hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that a large tranche of aid was voted by the European Parliament the other week to help the democratic process. We must ensure that the money is used for precisely that purpose —that it does not disappear into holes and is not misappropriated. That responsibility will lie primarily with the European institutions, but I do not doubt that my right hon. Friend will have a say in the matter, as indeed she should.

The hon. Member for Brent, South rightly said that this settlement is entirely different from the position reached in Zimbabwe. He made a point which must, I believe, always be made about any circumstances in southern Africa— that, however much it may be deplored, the truth is that the economy of southern Africa as a whole depends entirely on South Africa, its railway systems and its ports. Most ironically of all, even on Namibia's independence its main port, Walvis Bay, will still legally be an integral part of South Africa because of a settlement reached in 1896, when the British occupied it and it was passed on to the Cape colony. A final irony is that when Namibia rescinded some of the apartheid laws, people who broke the Immorality Act in Walvis Bay would be arrested and tried in South Africa but put in gaol in Namibia, where breaking the Act was no longer a crime—a truly bizarre situation. Matters will not necessarily become easier with independence, and in some respects they may even become more difficult.

I support what the hon. Gentleman said about increasing the size of UNTAG. More troops are needed on the ground, as well as more administrative support. Of course, that will not ultimately overcome the problem of dependence on South Africa—both on its administrators and on its supply routes—as the hon. Gentleman hopes because to get equipment through to support the United Nation troops requires the use of South African facilities. That is another example of the complexity of the problem and the difference between Namibia and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, I believe that the extra cost of bringing in administrators and troops will be worth while because the alternatives are worse—either the settlement will break down and we shall go back to where we were, or find ourselves in a worse position and if independence breaks down we shall end up with a second Congo, which would be horrific. There must be a right to return for the exiles and all those who went into exile must be accounted for. The hon. Member for Brent, South commented on the South African record, but one must also comment on the SWAPO record. There are some nasty rumours about what has happened to some of the exiles and detainees in SWAPO hands.

The solution will not be easy. We know all too well that the concept of the nation state, which has been foisted on Africa as a whole, is a western European concept based on the boundaries drawn by the colonial powers and does not accord with the reality of the stage of development in many countries. The idea that political parties are anything other than expressions of national or tribal feeling is nonsense. When many make the prediction that SWAPO will win the election, it is based on the simple statistic that the Ovambo people, who are SWAPO's main support, now constitute about 52 per cent. of the population. In 1980, they were about 46 per cent. of the population. Many Ovambo were previously in Angola because of the colonial division drawn through the middle of their territory but have now come to Namibia, so there is an additional 6 per cent. of Ovambo who are refugees from Angola. There is no way to distinguish between those who are theoretically Namibian citizens and those who are theoretically Angolan citizens.

As 52 per cent. of the population support SWAPO, it is likely that SWAPO will gain a majority, although I am not sure that it will gain the two thirds needed to set up the constitution. As the hon. Member for Brent, South said, that is currently the key argument about the settlement. We need more resources in Namibia now to ensure that a settlement takes place. The alternative of a breakdown after independence, which would be a replay of the Congo or Angola where there were nearly equally balanced power blocs, is too awful to contemplate. Every hon. Member would agree with that point of view.

9.53 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) on raising this debate. He has brought a measure of sense into the debate that did not, I am afraid, exist when the Prime Minister spoke in the House a week ago last Tuesday. I also want to congratulate him on going to Namibia and being there at a time when the situation was very dangerous for him and, of course, for the people of Namibia.

The hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) mentioned to me some time ago that he had been invited to South Africa by the South African Government. He admitted to me that he had been shocked by apartheid in practice, but clearly he was not shocked enough to be able to change sides and join us in opposing the apartheid system perpetrated by the South African Government. I shall not be as friendly as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South. There are a number of culprits who need to be named and the first and chief culprit is the Prime Minister herself. She has been aware for some considerable time of the situation in Namibia.

On 31 January 1989 I asked the Prime Minister this question:

"Is the Prime Minister aware that the United Nations secretary-general has been compelled by the five permanent members of the Security Council, including Britain, to propose a reduction in the number of United Nations troops in Namibia from 7,500 to 4,650 during the transition to independence? Has she heard the views of President Mugabe

of Zimbabwe, who has stated that the five permanent members of the Security Council have been fiddling with the moralities of resolution 435? In view of the fact that she will shortly be visiting Zimbabwe and that South Africa continues to support armed bandits and assassination gangs, will she review Britain's position in this matter and insist that the original numbers of troops be maintained?"

That was a pretty straightforward question. In reply the Prime Minister said:

"I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would wish to uphold a decision of the five permanent members of the Security Council. We shall honour it. The agreement was an excellent one and was obtained by the co-operation of those five members plus the co-operation of South Africa and Angola. I believe that we should do everything in our power to see that it is fulfilled. As far as this country is concerned, we pay our full subscription to United Nations peace-maintaining forces everywhere."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1989; Vol. 146, c. 163.]

As usual, the Prime Minister avoided the issue, but there is no way in which she can say that she was not warned about the position.

We talked in great detail about the reduction in United Nations troops. I asked the Prime Minister whether Britain, as one of the five permanent members of the Security Council, would intervene and insist that the original number of troops should be maintained. She refused to do so. The Prime Minister owes the House an explanation not only because she refused to take any notice of that point, but also because of her subsequent actions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South referred to the fact that the Prime Minister quoted from the so-called confidential document. I am pleased that she has taken the initiative and that that United Nation document is to be placed in the Library. However, we still need an explanation from the Prime Minister about the matter. After her evasion of the truth, in her usual arrogant way she sent along the Leader of the House to apologise for her. She did not and she could not bring herself to apologise in person.

The Prime Minister also said that SWAPO was guilty of "a most serious challenge to the authority of the United Nations."

There is no provision in the United Nations plan that prohibits the entry of SWAPO personnel into the country prior to the commencement of the plan. The real challenge to the United Nations was the breach of the ceasefire. There is no evidence that SWAPO opened fire first. All the evidence from independent sources blames the South African police and Koevoet for launching unprovoked attacks against SWAPO. We challenge the Prime Minister to produce evidence that SWAPO was the first to breach the ceasefire.

Mr. Hunter: Is the hon. Gentleman asking the House to accept that the United Nations process for the implementation of resolution 435 includes armed—I stress the word "armed"—SWAPO guerrillas entering Namibia after 1 April? Does he understand that that was part of the agreement?

Mr. Grant: As far as I am aware, United Nations resolution 435 does not prevent SWAPO guerrillas from entering the country. That is what is important. If there is nothing to prevent SWAPO guerrillas from entering the country, they are at liberty to do so. It is, after all, their country. It is not the United Nations' country or South Africa's country. They have a right to enter the country whenever they wish.

The Prime Minister also said that SWAPO had committed itself to the Geneva accord. The words "Geneva protocol" would have been more correct. Under that accord, SWAPO is required to stay north of the 16th parallel in Angola. SWAPO was not a party to the accord, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South mentioned, nor has it ever endorsed it. The only undertaking that SWAPO gave was to agree to a unilateral ceasefire in accordance with the protocol. Nor does this protocol form any part of the United Nations plan. Again, we challenge the Prime Minister or her right hon. Friend the Minister of State to produce evidence that SWAPO has ever committed itself to the Geneva protocol.

The question with which I and, I am sure, other Members on both sides of the House are left is this: why was the Prime Minister so gullible? Why was she so easily taken in by the propaganda of the South African forces? I hope that the Minister of State will answer some other questions. Why, for instance, did she not make a statement to the House when she returned——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

Mr. Grant: Why, for instance, did she not make a statement to the House after her visit to southern Africa, as she did last year after she had been to Nigeria and north African countries? What was she afraid of? Was she afraid that her statements would be put to the test? Could she not have answered the questions that we wanted to put to her? Why was she afraid?

There is another question: why did she seem to get everything wrong? Why was she so eager to accept the South African position? Did she not read—as I did—the report of the United Nations' representative in Namibia, which said that SWAPO did not have any hostile intent? Did she not think, "Maybe I can give them the benefit of the doubt"? Certainly not. I suggest to the House that the Prime Minister is, indeed, a true friend of the racists and that she cannot stand the idea of Namibian independence. That is the fact of the matter.

I should like to go on at length, but we want to hear an answer from the Minister. However, I have to say that there has been another party to this misinformation—the press, the media. I was shocked when I read reports emanating from Windhoek, from the chief reporter of *The Independent*, who not only accepted the South African position, hook, line and sinker, but went on to attack Sam Nujoma, the Secretary-General of SWAPO, in terms that made it clear to me that *The Independent*, through its reporters in Windhoek, was basically acting as the agent of the South African defence forces.

We demand that the Prime Minister come before the House and make a proper statement about her visit to Namibia, about the fact that she interfered in the peace process there, about the fact that she refused to do anything about the cut in the UNTAG forces put forward by the Security Council, of which the United Kingdom is a member. We demand that she come here to give an explanation about the confidentiality of the report of the United Nations Secretary-General. We demand that she give evidence as to why she thinks that SWAPO has broken any agreements—and we want her to produce those agreements.

[Mr. Grant]

Many hon. Members and many people outside who are paying attention to our deliberations want answers to at least some of those questions. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer some of them this evening, but the Prime Minister should certainly be here.

10.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I shall disregard much of what we have heard because I believe it to be wrong and irrelevant to the process of independence in Namibia. The essential point is that the process must work because there is so much at stake. So much can go wrong in Namibia and the implications of things going wrong are fearful to predict with regard to other parts of southern Africa.

SWAPO is no angelic force and its leader, Sam Nujoma, is no angel. It has committed monstrous crimes in the name of its pursuit of freedom and independence in Namibia. We must not forget that in past years there have been many people—black skins, white skins and people from many origins and races—trying to create a basis for a genuine democratic state in Namibia. They must succeed.

I shall say no more other than to stress the fact that one must dicount the proposition that SWAPO is a redeeming force any more than one can say that the African National Congress is the redeeming force for South Africa. There are other forces of moderation and compromise which are seeking a way to create a genuine democratic society. That must be the way.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunter: No, I have finished.

10.6 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I welcome the opportunity that has been provided by the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) to speak about the latest developments in Namibia and the first two difficult weeks of the implementation of the United Nations plan for the transition to independence. These are events of major regional and international importance.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said, independence must be made to work in Namibia. The process must succeed. It is vital to Her Majesty's Government and everyone who wants to see peace in Namibia that we do everything we can to make the process succeed. As the hon. Member for Brent, South said, success is vital to the Oshikati boy and all the other young people, let alone those who have suffered a great deal in recent years.

That success can take place only if all parties adhere to the United Nations plan. It is also crucial that the authority of the United Nations is upheld. Therefore, I hope that, despite one or two remarks we have heard tonight, the House will unite in emphasising that Britain will give unstinting support, as it has already, to the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General, his special representative in Namibia, and all those who are working for peace in that much benighted country.

I shall respond to the remarks made about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the hon. Members for Brent, South and for Tottenham (Mr. Grant). My right hon. Friend condemned SWAPO on the basis of information which had been given to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. It is clear that her judgment, on Tuesday before last, of the events that had occurred was correct. It was not only her judgment but it was shared by the United States, Cuba, Angola and the Soviet Union. I happen to know that it is shared by some African nations which are as concerned as anybody in the House to see peace in Namibia.

When the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council was delivered on 3 April it was delivered in confidence, although much of its content was known. I am surprised that the Secretary-General should use the hon. Member for Brent, South as his channel of communication. Nevertheless, the information has been known to all of us, if not the exact wording. When hon. Members have the chance to see the exact wording they will know exactly why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have spoken about the incursions in the way we have.

Enough of that——

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Mrs. Chalker: I would like to get on, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me. He did speak for some 52 minutes. That is his right, I know, but he gave me a lot of things to answer, so perhaps he will let me continue.

The hon. Gentleman made a very interesting defence of SWAPO in his contribution tonight, but he failed to disguise two vital points. First, none of the bloodshed, the deaths that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) referred to and many others have so wept over, would have occurred if SWAPO had not violated the agreement it indeed had come to with the United Nations.

The Prime Minister's intervention in Windhoek on 1 April saved the peace process from complete collapse. I do not think there is any doubt in this country or in any of the other permanent member countries of the Security Council that without that intervention there could have been a far worse situation in Namibia.

I want to move on to what happened on the first——

Mr. Grant *rose*——

Mrs. Chalker: No, I will not give way at the moment. The hon. Gentleman has already spoken.

I want to move on from the first day of the agreement because throughout recent months this country has been thoroughly active in support of the United Nations plan. In recent days our Signals unit of about 170 people arrived in Namibia and was immediately deployed to the north. It is playing a leading role there, not only carrying out its signals task but manning the nine assembly points to which the SWAPO insurgents are due to report. In the light of the need to speed up deployment of the United Nations transitional assistance group, Britain made available to the United Nations at under two days' notice 55 Land Rovers and 12 4-ton trucks, which were airlifted earlier this week to Namibia. We have already contributed half a million pounds to UNHCR for the repatriation of Namibian refugees.

I should like to say to the hon. Member for Brent, South that I will look into why that money is not already

passing through to RRR and the Churches. Certainly it has been paid over because, as in all other cases, the United Kingdom pays its dues promptly to the United Nations and intends to go on doing so.

In addition to that, let me just remind the House that the financial contribution from Britain to UNTAG is about £14 million. In other words, we are determined to do all we can to establish peace in Namibia. That is true of those people who collect through their Churches to send goods out to Namibia right through the whole of our population, including the Prime Minister. I refute absolutely what the hon. Member for Tottenham said. He made a number of very foolish statements tonight. I hope that I shall not have to haunt him with them in the years ahead.

Let me say one other thing about the tragic blunder that SWAPO made in sending over 1,800 troops south across the border into Namibia in contravention of the United Nations plan. I do not want to dwell on it, but there is one point that I think is very important.

Mr. Grant *rose*——

Mrs. Chalker: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will just let me finish my sentence.

Some commentators have claimed that the five permanent members of the Security Council were somehow at fault because the total numbers deployed by UNTAG are fewer than originally envisaged in the 1978 United Nations plan. This is nonsense. It was the United Nations Secretary-General who decided, on the basis of expert military advice which was gathered in Namibia, the size of the force required for UNTAG. He formed his report on the basis of information gathered at the end of 1988 and it was presented to the Security Council on 23 January this year.

The five permanent members of the Security Council, including ourselves, supported him immediately, but the Security Council as a whole accepted the Secretary-General's recommendations finally only on 16 February. The General Assembly then delayed its approval until 1 March.

By telling the House those dates, I seek to explain why 4,650 persons were not deployed on 1 April. It was because we had gone through a regrettable delay, caused by the filibustering of those who disagreed with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The six weeks that were lost at that point were crucial.

Even if all the UNTAG troops had been in Namibia on 1 April, they could not have prevented the bloodshed in the north. The House should remember that UNTAG was never designed to engage in a pitched battle with armed insurgents. It was to keep the peace and to take Namibia through the transitional process to its elections on 1 November.

Mr. Grant: The Minister emphatically said that SWAPO broke the United Nations agreement. Will she give us chapter and verse about any agreement that SWAPO made with the United Nations on this matter? Will she give us the facts, if not tonight then at some other time?

Mrs. Chalker: There was no excuse for misunderstanding by SWAPO. We accept that the United Nations plan is not a single document. It consists of a settlement proposal, followed by a large number of subsequent agreements and understandings which date back as far as 1978. The facts are as follows. The document to which Opposition Members have sought to refer today and on previous occasions was the then Secretary-General's report back in February 1979. That is the only document that has ever proposed that any SWAPO forces would be in Namibia at the time of the ceasefire. That proposal was made without consultation with the contact group, and it was overtaken in 1982 when SWAPO agreed that the clause should be disregarded. An agreement was reached on monitoring by UNTAG of SWAPO bases which would be in Angola and Zambia.

It is clear from the Secretary-General's report of 23 January this year that UNTAG's military tasks, which are listed in paragraph 43, were without reference to SWAPO bases inside Namibia. Further to that, it was made clear that, in August last year, SWAPO forces would be deployed to the north of the 16th parallel in Angola. That matter was known and acceped by SWAPO. SWAPO told the Secretary-General in August last year that it unilaterally accepted the Geneva accord. Early this year, in New York, it was again reminded of the exact arrangements. There was no excuse for it not to know.

The actual deployment of which I have spoken and which was so delayed is most important. We have always pressed for the speedy deployment of the 4,650 men. The Finnish battalion went with the airlift of equipment from Britain and will take up position on Saturday 15 April. That will mean that all three battalions will be fully deployed by 20 April.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East and other hon. Members have referred to reinforcements. We have said from the beginning that we and other Security Council members will promptly consider any request by the Secretary-General of the United Nations for further reinforcements of the 4,650, but there is no sign that that request will necessarily be forthcoming. If it is forthcoming, it will be carried out quickly. There is also no need for further United Nations troop numbers if we can keep the United Nations plan on track. Observers, of whom there are increased numbers in the 4,650, represent a more important way of proceeding in this matter.

Since 1 April, when we have been more active than perhaps could have been anticipated in getting the United Nations plan on track, our representations have concentrated on encouraging each party to honour the agreed United Nations plan. As the House knows, the Joint Commission of Angola, Cuba and South Africa met urgently last weekend at Mount Etjo. It produced a declaration which we strongly support.

That set up a process for restoring the ceasefire and putting the United Nations plan back in being by setting up a mechanism for monitoring SWAPO assembly and withdrawal to Angola. Our embassies in Capetown and Luanda and the British liaison office in Windhoek are active in supporting the implementation of that Mount Etjo declaration.

It would be wrong to pretend that there are no problems; some of them we have heard about tonight. But let us not forget that the arrangements to assist with this withdrawal exercise could not have been prepared in advance because such arrangements would never have been necessary if we had not had the movement by SWAPO over the border from Angola into northern Namibia on 1 April in contravention of the United Nations plan.

[Mrs. Chalker]

That incursion was the root cause of many of the problems that we have since seen. It is now vital that SWAPO should withdraw north of the 16th parallel in Angola, that its bases there should be monitored by the Angolans, as previously agreed, and by UNTAG, and that all sides should show restraint.

That brings me to an important matter raised by the hon. Member for Brent, South and to a question he asked me yesterday. We believe that not only must SWAPO return north of the 16th parallel and its forces be under effective supervision, but that South African forces, too, must return to the position of 31 March—that is, to be confined to base and to be monitored by UNTAG: even-handed completely.

The declaration at Mount Etjo envisaged SWAPO reporting to UNTAG, but there was also provision in the declaration for a South African presence at the assembly points, and indeed for the Angolans to be present at the seven of nine assembly points which are on the border. We would naturally expect that the South African defence force and the south-west African police presence could not be on such a scale or deployed in such a way as to inhibit SWAPO reporting there.

We were also concerned about reports that the security forces wished to interrogate or even to photograph or fingerprint SWAPO forces. We made our concerns known to the South African Government at a high level. The House will have noted that since then the South African Foreign Minister has said that any questions about the identity of those reporting to assembly points will be asked by UNTAG, and he has confirmed that UNTAG will supervise the agreed procedure.

Mr. Pik Botha has also stated that there is no question of SWAPO members being interrogated and that the South African Government would not object to an extension of the period for SWAPO members to present themselves to the assembly points. It is also important that members of SWAPO should not seek to hide their arms in caches and merge themselves into the civilian population in Namibia. Our concern is that all concerned—I repeat, all concerned—must abide by what was agreed at Mount Etjo.

Another important point raised by the hon. Member for Brent, South was about Koevoet. South Africa has been disbanding the Koevoet counter-insurgency units. Certainly, some of them have been absorbed into the south-west African police. He knows that we hold no brief for Koevoet, and in the past we have raised their excesses with the South African Government.

No fewer than 500 United Nations police monitors will now be there alongside the Signals regiment from Britain, and others. Those police monitors deployed in Namibia —an increase of 140 on the 1978 level—will be there to monitor and see exactly what is going on. All the South African police and defence forces will be subject to monitoring under that plan by the observers who are being sent there.

I remind the House that the sooner SWAPO forces withdraw to Angola, the sooner effective police monitoring by the United Nations of the South African forces and police force can begin. It is obvious that the task of the monitors will be easier in conditions of peace, which is what their presence was designed for, than it would be if a bush war were raging.

Only when the withdrawal process has operated properly in Namibia can the United Nations special representative and the Administrator-General carry out their original tasks as set out in the United Nations plan. They will then be able to decide on the repeal of discriminatory legislation, which is vital, and on an agreed electoral system. It is crucial that there should be no more breaches of the United Nations plan by anyone. We will be monitoring implementation very closely and giving our full support to the United Nations. We also hope to work closely with other missions on the ground. The front-line states have a particular role to play and we welcome their decision to establish an office in Windhoek and will be working with them.

The hon. Member for Brent, South raised three other general points of genuine concern. On the first, refugee reception is a priority and we are anxious that it should go smoothly. I have already mentioned the £500,000 for UNHCR and we shall look into what the hon. Gentleman said about the RRR committee. We urge all the parties involved to agree to a system to assist the return of refugees efficiently and humanely.

The hon. Member for Brent, South also referred to the importance of political prisoners being freed. I agree. Political prisoners on both sides must be freed. Let us not forget that SWAPO has admitted holding over 100 political prisoners in Angola. We are concerned not only about those who have been prisoners of the South Africans; we look to SWAPO too to implement this important part of the agreement.

On human rights, we understand that the United Nations is already planning to talk to human rights groups. We are concerned that the United Nations special representative should have access to information from a wide range of sources, including SWAPO, and we have already raised this point in the Security Council. I am confident that the United Nations will have thorough discussions to meet all the concerns that the hon. Member for Brent, South mentioned and that others, including myself, will mention.

The hon. Member for Brent, South was in Namibia during the first days of the process. In the next seven months, there is a three-month period for the repeal of discriminatory legislation and for agreement on the electoral system. A four-month election campaign will start at the end of June. Under the agreed plan, the South Africans were under no obligation to negotiate on the legislation or on the electoral system before 1 April. However, that must happen now and those are the things that we want the Administrator-General and the special representative to get on with.

We have been giving aid to Namibia since 1976 and we shall be giving further aid. We hope that as peace is established, we shall be able to give further economic assistance both bilaterally and through the European Community.

We shall be watching most carefully to see that there is maximum freedom of information during the electoral process and minimum intimidation. We must be realistic. It is impossible to rule out all intimidation and I think that the hon. Member for Brent, South accepts that. We know that there will be problems and that there will have to be maximum restraint. However, the first priority must be for

us and all other nations that want peace in Namibia to support the authority of the United Nations and help it to get on with its job.

Yes, we want to put an end to violence and intimidation and we want to make sure that the political parties can put their case over. I spoke only this morning about the media, and especially the radio, becoming involved in the process.

It is true that the process started badly—indeed, it started very badly with the insurgency from the north—but provided that the Mount Etjo decision and agreement is speedily and completely implemented, I believe that the process of peace will not only be put on the track but kept on the track. It goes without saying that a successful move to independence is vital for Namibians of all parties and all ages, from the Oshikati boy to the oldest Namibian who wants to see his country free.

However, I believe that the implications go even wider than that. A successful transition to independence for Namibia will have a major impact on the prospects of peace in Angola and on the stability of the region as a whole——

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 14 April 1989

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Chiswick (Road Proposals)

9.34 am

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): I beg leave to present a petition signed by 11,793 people living, working and visiting in and around the Chiswick area of my constituency who are vehemently and determinedly opposed to the damaging, new major road proposals for this lovely part of west London.

I pay tribute to the dedicated work of Michael Robinson, Nigel Birch, Steve Brook and others, who have gathered these many signatures from those stating:

That we are opposed to any new proposals which include major road building in Chiswick and in particular to the new major roads proposed in options 3, 4 and 7 of Stage 2a of the West London Assessment Study.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urges the Right Honourable Paul Channon MP, the Secretary of State for Transport to dismiss from further consideration all proposals for major road building through Chiswick in the light of the destruction of homes and major damage to the environment and local community life these new roads would cause.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I hope that the House will note, and the Secretary of State will act in accordance with, the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Control of Smoke Pollution Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the two verbal amendments in the name of the hon Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), and it will be convenient to discuss them together.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is unusual for the Third Reading of a Bill, for which amendments are printed, to appear on the Order Paper. For the enlightenment of those of us who are not well acquainted with such matters, will you explain this?

Mr. Speaker: These are verbal amendments—of words. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the amendment paper he will see that they are small amendments to the words in the Bill and do not affect the sense of the Bill. This is unusual, but not unprecedented.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will we be allowed to speak on the verbal amendments when they are announced—which will, I assume, be at the start of the speech of the hon. Member for Basingstoke?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, of course there will be a debate on the amendments. However, the hon. Gentleman will see from the Order Paper and the amendment paper that it will be a narrow debate.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said that these amendments involve changes of words, but I thought that all amendments were changes of words. I took it for granted that if someone put down an amendment to a motion, it would change a word or delete some words. Do I take it that, in future, if someone wants to amend Bills on Third Reading—this is purely for the benefit of future exercises—they will be able to amend them on the basis that they are merely changing a few odd words here and there? Is that in order?

Mr. Speaker: Of course, I look at any amendments on the amendment paper carefully and it is not unprecedented to have verbal amendments. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) asked for an explanation. I used the word "verbal" meaning "of a word" rather than "by the mouth". Is that clear?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, right.

Mr. Ray Powell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is important—you mentioned that this would be a narrow debate. In fact, it will embrace the Clean Air Acts, and, therefore, could be a wide-ranging debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) asked about submitting amendments—we are on Third Reading and I assume that we shall discuss the debates which have taken place prior to this.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member may have a somewhat wider debate when we come to Third Reading, but the first debate is on the Question, That the amendment be made. I think that we should now move to that.

Title

9.39 am

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I beg to move, amendment No. 1, in title, leave out 'repeal' and insert 'amend'.

I understand that I may also speak to amendment No. 2, in title, leave out 'to amend'.

Perhaps I should explain that the only controversy about a vote on the Bill has been whether its modest objectives constitute the repealing of the Clean Air Acts or their amendment.

The debate has swayed backwards and forwards. When the Bill was drafted I was advised that it was a repealing measure. Subsequently, informed opinion decided that the modest contents of the Bill amounted to an amending of the Clean Air Acts. No matter of substance arises from the amendments and I commend them to the House.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has said, it is extraordinary that we should have reached this stage of a Bill with so little debate. It is a small Bill but it is an important amendment to existing legislation. There has been no discussion of the Bill until this stage, and it is only now that it has come to light that the amendments are necessary. That is because the Bill, as it has been compiled by the parliamentary draftsman, or whoever, overlooks the fact that it deals with the amendment rather than with the repeal of legislation.

I look forward to the Third Reading debate because the Bill is important in the context of air pollution. Until now, we have had only a few words of discussion about the Bill in the House. It is extraordinary that the Bill has got so far without the House examining it in more detail. *Hansard* deals with the Bill in seven lines:

"**CONTROL OF SMOKE POLLUTION BILL**

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Hunter.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

To be read the Third time on Friday 14 April."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1989; Vol. 148, c. 571.]

It may well be that all legislation is important in terms of the speed and urgency with which it comes to the House. However, I wish that the Secretary of State had the same sense of urgency about bringing forward the green Bill and dealing with the many very important related issues of air pollution. I may not be here at the end of the debate because I have other urgent engagements. However, I have brought these matters to the attention of the House. In case I am not here when the Bill is passed, I should now like to congratulate its promoter on having introduced it. I regret that such an important, albeit minor, change to existing legislation should have got so far without debate. I urge the Government to treat the whole matter of environmental protection with much greater urgency.

9.45 am

Mr. Stanbrook: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for your assurance that the amendment is in order. However, I am still somewhat mystified about how on Third Reading we can get such a drastic change in the wording of the Bill. The purpose of the Bill is:

"To repeal section 16(1)(a) of the Clean Air Act 1956 and to amend section 1 of the Clean Air Act 1968."

The amendment seeks to amend section 16(1)(a) of the 1956 Act and to repeal section 1 of the 1968 Act. The original intention of the Bill was to delete section 16(1)(a) of the 1956 Act and to leave something in section 1 of the 1968 Act after the legislative process. We are now told that that was not the intention, but that it was to leave something of the 1956 Act and to delete section 1 of the 1968 Act.

How on earth is it possible for a Bill to come before the House and go through all its legislative stages with such a decisive and fundamental flaw? Did no one discover that nothing would be left of section 1 of the 1968 Act? Has that only just been discovered? We ought to have some sort of explanation, if only for the satisfaction of the legal draftsman.

Mr. Ray Powell: I am still rather confused about how amendments could have been allowed to be tabled. I do not have the legal knowledge of the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) and I should like to be assured that the amendments are entirely in order. I have no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that you have examined them in detail.

Amendment 1 seeks to leave out "repeal" and insert "amend". There is a profound difference in the meanings of the two words. If we repeal something, we take it away, but if we amend it we merely add to or subtract from what is already there. Those of us who have studied in great depth the Clean Air Acts and the repercussions of any repeal of their clauses or amendments to them, realise that that needs to be thoroughly examined. This morning we have been presented with two verbal amendments—a term that I have not heard before in the House. We have always had amendments that we can study in conjunction with the Acts to see their repercussions. It appals me to think that on a Friday we are discussing such far-reaching effects as are to be found in the Bill.

Smoke has always been prevalent in my area, because it was a mining area. In 1979 there were 7,000 to 8,000 miners in my constituency, all of whom were entitled to receive an allocation of free coal. That meant that coal was the fuel used throughout my constituency. When one stood on Bwlch mountain and looked down over the four valleys of my constituency, on a lovely morning such as this one could see smoke coming from practically every chimney. I arrived in London at the tender age of 17 and lived in Minet drive in Harlesden. I worked at Old Oak common in Acton and used to walk to work, because even in those days I could not afford to take the tube. No one was worried about riding in the tube in those days.

I am not all that old, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps I am a little older than you. In those days, many of us who had come to London used to tie a strip of gauze around the nose and mouth when we were going for a walk and when there was smoke or fog about in London. When I arrived in Acton, which was only about a 20 or 25-minute walk from Willesden and Harlesden, I would find a smear as black as coal on my mouth and on the gauze across my nostrils. That was caused by the pollution in London at that time.

We know, too, of the effect of pollution on this building. We cannot see a number of the statues at Westminster Hall because they were destroyed by pollution. It is therefore essential that at this stage we get right any measures that control air pollution. That is why

I strongly object to amendments being thrown in on a Friday morning without Members who have taken an interest in the matter being able to look at them in detail.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): As my hon. Friend will know, I am a new Member of the House. I heard it said that this was an unusual procedure. Can my hon. Friend tell me how many times this procedure has been used and when was the last time that amendments have been presented in this way?

Mr. Powell: I cannot reply to that point, but I posed the same question in a point of order before I started my speech. I realise that my hon. Friend might have been delayed because he was seeking out the amendments to the Bill. I missed Prayers, in fact, because I was informed, as I was coming into the Chamber, that there were amendments to the Bill. I appreciate my hon. Friend's problem, and probably you, Mr. Speaker, can inform him of what has happened.

Mr. Skinner: My information is that the last time that this was done was 18 years ago, but it was done in completely different circumstances. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has been explaining, we have before us today a Bill whose several stages were rushed through at the end of business one Friday. The Bill was probably planted on the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). I am not too sure about that, but all the signs are that a Government Whip went along and said, "Shove this forward for a particular Friday in order to block something else." That is what usually happens and, therefore, those very weird circumstances have taken place. It is conceivable that the hon. Gentleman himself was not sure what the issue was all about. It went through on the nod and the result is that we have a Bill that in many ways is so cock-eyed that it should have been taken back.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore is on to a very good point. I am certain that the way in which the Government have pushed through the measure has been an embarrassment to the authorities of the House.

I think, too, that there is another reason for us having this mess, which is that the Prime Minister went green—or mouldy, as some would say—some time ago, and she had to prove that she meant business. So what better than to say, "Let's look as though we are going green on the Clean Air Act and beef it up a bit"? A Whip therefore looked for a participant on the Tory Benches and said to him, "Here you are, we can make it look as though the Tory party is carrying out its green proposals." However, because it is not really a party that is in favour of collective green action, the Government got the whole thing wrong.

Mr. Powell: I agree with my hon. Friend. I understand what he says about the progress of the Bill from stage one. However, I do not know whether I could go as far as to suggest that Whips on either side of the House would have been involved in such matters. I very much doubt whether they would have been involved in any sort of intrigue. You yourself, Mr. Speaker, will accept that Whips would not become involved in such actions.

I shall return to the first amendment, concerning the word "repeal", and what my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said about the Prime Minister. What appals me is the fact that my secretary and agent—who is a councillor of some 35 years' standing and a justice of the peace, who has received an MBE and is well-respected in my constituency—was appointed to the national Clean Air Council. She is a miner's widow. She had a great interest in pollution and she regularly attended the meetings. She reported to me regularly about the discussions at those meetings.

Then in 1979, there was an election and the green goddess got to number 10—although she was not as green as she is now. She walked up the yellow brick road and she got to number 10 Downing street. Overnight, the right hon. Lady abolished the Clean Air Council. She dismissed the services of my secretary and agent, Councillor Mrs. Muriel Williams, MBE, JP, with her 35 years' experience in local government and in other areas.

Now, 10 years later, because a big conference was to be held in London, involving 124 representatives from all over the world, the right hon. Lady has become interested in the Clean Air Act 1968. It is a pity that she was not interested in 1979 or 1980 and she did not retain the services of my secretary-agent of 70 years of age to look after the interests of the people in my constituency and in Wales.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is it not a fact that, because the Government—for example, under planning laws—have made it much easier for people to develop in areas where previously it was not acceptable, that there will be more pollution rather than less? This sort of amendment will have a direct effect on the quality of life of all our constituents.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend is right in saying that there are some considerable problems. I shall illustrate one planning problem and the difficulties caused to some Members of Parliament. We are looking—especially in parts of Wales—for industrialists to come into our areas to invest, because we want industry and we want jobs. Whether they come from Japan or anywhere else, we seek them out to provide jobs in our areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), has a problem, because she has a phurnacite plant in Abercwmboi, which produces smokeless fuels. However, the production of those smokeless fuels, causes a tremendous amount of pollution.

Mr. Speaker: The amendment concerns the changing of two words. I believe that what the hon. Gentleman has said is more appropriate to the Third Reading of the Bill.

Mrs. Dunwoody: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, which is related precisely to the wording. It appears that "to amend", which in this case is a verb without any qualifying wording, could create considerable difficulty for the House. I should have thought that the parliamentary draftsmen, who are so careful about the use of the English language, would have told us that such a verb, without any qualification, could create considerable difficulty. Is it not the case that "to amend" must by implication give some indication of the manner in which, how and to what extent it amends? A verbal amendment of this kind will lead my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, for example, who is developing specific points about smoke control, into considerable difficulty if he does not know in which way the Bill is to be amended and to what extent.

Mr. Speaker: The House sometimes finds itself in difficulties when a Bill goes through all its stages without any debate. The House will know that the Chair is in difficulty, and that it deprecates that practice. However,

[Mr. Speaker]

such a difficulty has arisen today and that is why, exceptionally, the House must consider amendments on Third Reading.

10 am

Mrs. Dunwoody: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would never dream of arguing with you, as I know that you are only following precedent—that you will have been given advice and will be aware that such a precedent has been established. The difficulty lies in debating a narrowly drawn amendment that seeks to substitute only one word, but that will basically change the Bill without the House knowing in what manner the Bill is to be changed. While I have no desire to argue with the Chair, the amendment creates enormous problems. If the debate on the amendment is narrowly confined—obviously the Chair will want the right hon. and hon. Members to keep well within the rules of order—the House will have to agree or disagree to the amendment without being perfectly clear as to its exact meaning. The problem is not the amendment itself but the enormous implications that it has for the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: I say again that we are in this difficulty because of what happened. However, the House must observe the rules of order. The debate on the amendment is narrow, but the Third Reading debate is much wider.

Ms. Walley: Further to that point of order, and to my introductory remarks, I believe that you, Mr. Speaker, have been placed in a very difficult situation. Obviously there is no way in which the situation can be redeemed in respect of the Bill and of the whole issue of smoke control and related matters of air pollution. However, I wonder whether you could discuss the situation with whoever has responsibility for such matters, to ensure that the House will face a similar situation again. Then at least something constructive would come out of the Government's clear attempt to ensure that the Prime Minister has some sound evidence to show the nation that she has gone green.

Mr. Speaker: It is not unprecedented for a Bill to go through all its stages on a Friday. However, I repeat that that practice is always deprecated by the Chair. Even small measures should never go through the House of Commons without debate.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point or order, Mr. Speaker. Normally, it would be difficult for my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) to speak at range over the whole compass of the Bill. However, the Bill passed through all its previous stages in a shabby fashion several Fridays ago, because it was planted in the fist of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) by the Whips, and he did not know what he had been given. That is the bottom line. That meant that the Bill could not be debated.

Mr. Speaker: That is in the hands of the House. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, it requires only one right hon. or hon. Member to object, and a Bill cannot immediately proceed.

Mr. Skinner: If I had been present, an objection would have been made. The fact that the hon. Member for Basingstoke has not spoken to the Bill at any length today creates another problem. He has given little or no indication of the Bill's purpose, which leaves the House in a predicament. On the first occasion that the hon. Gentleman is given an opportunity to speak to the Bill, he hardly opens his mouth. As a consequence, the House is left in a quandary.

In the absence of proper discussion, you, Mr. Speaker, would be correct to be more liberal in your interpretation of what can be said on this occasion, as compared with the situation in which full and frank discussion had earlier taken place. In the absence of full and frank discussion, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore must surely have the right to expand on his argument as to what effect the amendments would have in certain circumstances. In that context, my hon. Friend travelled down a reasonable path.

Mr. Speaker: We are all bound by Standing Orders. The hon. Gentleman in his other incarnation, when he has the difficult responsibility for chairing meetings, is bound by his standing orders.

Mr. Skinner: I get things through on the nod as well.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a very wise thing to do. I may point out that the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has the right of reply.

Mr. Powell: On only one occasion, at midnight some years ago, have I ever failed to respond to your ruling from the Chair, Mr. Speaker. I well recall the incident, because within two minutes I was going through the front gates. I do not want to do that this morning.

The first amendment seeks to leave out the word "repeal". The argument I was developing about the phurnacite plant at Abercwmboi is important in that respect, because if we repeal the Clean Air Acts of 1956 and 1968, that will have wide implications for the Cynon valley and for the plant. It will allow developers to take certain action which, if we amend the legislation rather than repeal it, they would not be allowed to take. Those are the reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why points of order were earlier raised and developed.

The products of the phurnacite plant are designed to protect the environment, so any amendments to the Bill would directly affect that plant. I presume that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, share the views expressed earlier as to how the House should deal with the two amendments, and as to whether right hon. and hon. Members are in order to develop further arguments about the Clean Air Acts and about the Bill itself. I appreciate that we are not having a Third Reading debate, so I shall not prolong the arguments. Nevertheless, because of the amendments' far-reaching effects, and until such time as the Chair brings me further to order, I shall cite one area of complication that affects my own constituency.

The Rockwool factory produces insulating fibre used in lofts and walls, which has a direct effect on energy conservation in the buildings in which that product is used. The factory produces a lot of smoke. In the Heol-y-Cyw and Pencoed areas, the community council, Ogwr borough council and the county council have been all involved in numerous objections about smoke emissions. That factory produces fibre that is used in energy conservation.

One of the dilemmas that face Members of Parliament, whatever their constituencies, is whether to join forces with the community and the borough or county council in objecting strongly to the pollution of an area or whether, in order to safeguard—in this instance—some 400 jobs, to

try to pacify some of the objectors. Those of use who are concerned about clean air take care to ensure that industrialists who come into such areas at least receive guidance.

All possible precautions have been taken. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) will have taken action at community level to try to stop the pollution in the area——

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is developing a reasonable argument about smoke and pollution. He may not yet have made up his mind about whether he favours "repeal" or "amend", but if we get on to that ground we shall, I think, be able to discuss the matter at some length and try to ascertain the truth. The crucial issue is whether my hon. Friend is in favour of the amendment or against it. I should like to hear the answer from him, because I am still in some doubt. Once we have heard whether he considers this a good or a bad amendment, we shall be able to dig a few tons of coal.

Mrs. Dunwoody *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Has the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) finished his speech?

Mr. Powell: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I cannot take an intervention on an intervention.

Mr. Powell: I accept what has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). This is an important point.

I have considered the matter carefully. Having tried at the same time to arrive here, read the amendments, listen to the objectors from the league of representatives on the Conservative Benches and be guided by them, by Mr. Speaker and by the Clerk of the House, and having then participated in the debate, I have found it difficult to decide between "repeal" and "amend". You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all your experience in the Chair and on the Front Bench, will know the problems with which we are sometimes confronted at this time on a Friday morning. I have decided, however, that I do not want the Act repealed, so I shall support the amendment.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am a little worried by what my hon. Friend has just said. I went out of the Chamber just now because I was concerned about the narrowness of the amendment. Having obtained a copy of the Oxford English dictionary and looked up the definition of "amend", I think that we are going to get into some difficulty.

The definition gives the French and Latin roots of the word, which I cannot use because, in using a foreign language, I should be out of order. It goes on, however, to explain the various meanings:

"to free . . . from faults, correct . . . convert . . . To rectify . . . To emendate. 1483"—

I had not encountered that. The dictionary also defines "amend" as to make alterations in a Bill before Parliament, to repair, to restore, to heal the sick, to improve, to better and to make amends for an offence.

That seems clear enough, until we begin to consider exactly what is meant here by "amend". Are we to amend specific parts of the wording? Are we to change or make better, and if so in what manner? Before my hon. Friend accepts the amendment and its implications so readily, will he consider that?

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend has made a valid point. She said that she could not give definitions in French or Latin because she would be out of order in doing so, but perhaps if she had given a Welsh definition that would have given me some guidance.

10.15 am

Mr. Skinner: I do not accept the point often made in the House that hon. Members cannot speak in other languages. The Prime Minister has several different languages of her own. She has changed her voice so many times that it is unbelievable. When Gordon Reece came along, he said to her, "You have got to lower your voice", so she came in here one day—not long after she had become Prime Minister—with a different voice. Then there is her stentorian-type voice.

As for foreign languages—for I see that you are shuffling in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker—lawyers often use Latin in here.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker—as this is an intervention on an intervention. Do not the rules of the House lay down that any language used here must be understood by other hon. Members? In that case, a foreign langage would not be ruled out. A language such as Welsh——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the practices of the House are sufficiently well known for us not have a debate on them. We are in danger of having a debate about the use of language rather than about the amendments. Can we get back to them?

Mr. Greenway: I am asking for information.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman consults "Erskine May". That is why we put copies out.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) should use the phrase "ultra vires". The whole thing is ultra vires.

Mr. Powell: All this discussion has come about because something has happened that I understand has not happened for 18 years. I was not a Member 18 years ago, but I am sure that other hon. Members will recall the incident. In all probability, if we looked it up in the *Official Report* we should find that there was just as lengthy a debate then on the introduction of "verbal" amendments on the Floor of the House.

We have been placed in this position because someone thrust these amendments in front of us five minutes before we came into the Chamber, stopping us from attending Prayers. It makes me wonder whether the House should have been adjourned for 10 or 15 minutes for us to consider whether to insert "amend" or retain "repeal". My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) had the chance to go out and seek advice, and then to pass on that advice to us, for which I am grateful. Having listened to her interpretation of "amend", I am in a dilemma as to whether to accept her advice.

Mr. Stanbrook: I think that the problem is even more difficult to solve than the hon. Gentleman supposes.

[Mr. Stanbrook]

Clause 1 clearly amends section 16 of the Clean Air Act 1956, whereas the wording in the title speaks of repealing it. It seems to be common sense, therefore, to change "repeal" to "amend". After all, clause 1 says:

"there shall be inserted the words".

That is clearly an amendment rather than a repeal.

However, clause 2, which we are invited to say is a repeal, simply states:

"In subsection (1) . . . after the words . . . there shall be inserted the words".

Clearly, that is an amendment, not a repeal. In other words, those who are bringing forward these provisions have got them the wrong way round in any event. Whereas one could agree that clause 1 is an amendment to the principal Act, one cannot agree that clause 2 is a repeal of the other principal Act. The wording by itself is an amendment, and that is our difficulty.

Mr. Powell: I have now been advised by a professionally qualified legal representative from the Conservative Benches, the hon. Member for Orpington, and I think that the Chair should be asked to consider this matter. I accept entirely what has been said, and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich has been concurring with that. If what has been said means that the wording should be turned around and, as on our arrival this morning we found these verbal amendments, perhaps we can seek advice from the Chair or the Clerks to see whether the amendments could be put the other way round. In view of what the hon. Member for Orpington has suggested, if we "repeal" as he suggested and "amend" as in the first amendment, would there be any opportunity for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to consider whether we would then be in order—or would we be more in order if the amendments were to be reversed? Perhaps the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) who promoted the Bill will agree to the amendments being reversed so that we can get on with debating the amendments. I ask for your guidance on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I continue with my speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the amendments had not been in order, they would not have been selected.

Mr. Powell: We accept that if they had not been in order, they would not have been selected, but it has been pointed out to us that, to be in order and to carry the meaning that I believe the promoter of the Bill intended, they should be reversed. Is it possible for them to be reversed at this stage as they were tabled only this morning?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is asking me a question rather different from the one that he posed in the first place. It is the question not whether the amendments are in order in terms of their admissibility under our Standing Orders and the usual test, or whether they would improve the structure of the Bill. The second point is not a matter for me. If the hon. Gentleman is asking whether it would be procedurally possible, the answer is that it may well have been possible at the outset of our proceedings, when the amendments were first brought to the attention of the House. Hon. Members may have sought then to seek to amend the amendments, but the choice now before the House is to accept or reject the amendments. That is what we shall have to do at the end of this debate.

Mrs. Dunwoody: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House is grateful for that clear statement of the position and, of course, we would not dream of arguing with your superior knowledge. However, the problem that we face is that on all Bills one of the first jobs of all hon. Members is to consider the title. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the wording of the title is very precise for all Bills and is of considerable importance to the main section of the Bill. That is why any attempt to alter the title must inevitably have consequential effects not only upon the amendments on the Order Paper, but upon the Bill as it is debated. The hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) highlighted the fact that this problem has a direct effect, not just upon the wording, but——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Lady making a point of order to me or a speech?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I want to know from you whether, if we proceed to debate the amendments in the order in which they have been presented to the House, in effect we shall not only be taking a major decision, but reversing our decision by discussing the second amendment—in other words——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Lady feels that she should advise the House that the amendments would have a far reaching effect on the remainder of the Bill or on parts of the Bill, it is up to her to seek to deploy that argument and so persuade the House. The question whether the title should have been as it is printed or as it is proposed to amend it was the question before the House when, in its wisdom or otherwise, it decided to give the Bill a Second Reading, which it did. The House gave the Bill an unopposed Second Reading and the Bill has been dealt with by the House in Committee, and these matters could have been dealt with then. We now have an amendment on Third Reading. Nothing is out of order.

Mrs. Dunwoody: With respect, I was not in any way suggesting that it was technically out of order; I was simply saying that the problem has arisen because these are verbal amendments. If they had been printed amendments in the normal fashion and if the House had had the opportunity of recognising the real technical difficulty that is incorporated in the way in which the two amendments have been tabled, undoubtedly we should have——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is very similar to a point of order that was raised with Mr. Speaker at the outset of our proceedings when Mr. Speaker dealt with the question of admissibility or otherwise, and whether the procedure that we now have is reconcilable with our practice and with Standing Orders. Mr. Speaker has ruled on that. We should now get back to discussing the merits of the amendments. I call Mr. Ray Powell.

Mr. Powell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are discussing in detail and the amendments their effects. As you suggested, if the House feels that we should not accept either amendment, we should reject them.

However, could you advise me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on whether, if we reject them, we would have a vote in the House on rejecting them, and on whether, if the vote were

carried by just one vote, we would accept that and reject them all? Hon. Members who are not in the Chamber now to hear the debate because they are in their offices carrying out their parliamentary work, will have eight minutes from the time that you call a Division for us to explain the amendments to them. We have been here since 9.35 am discussing their merits and whether they should have been tabled in the first place. If we accept your advice and call a Division on this, how would we explain to 649 elected representatives what they were about to vote for? That is the dilemma that some of us face. We should look at this in far more depth and detail.

Mr. Skinner: I wonder whether we should have to wait for other hon. Members to come in to the House. Not many are here on a Friday because it is a bit of a dead day and many Tory MPs are in the law courts. Some of them were to have been demonstrating, but the Government have caved in, in contrast to the way in which they have behaved with the dockers. As there will not be many hon. Members here, we shall be able to approach them individually and, like shop stewards or Whips, we shall have to say something like, "There was a cock-eyed situation in Parliament this morning. An hon. Gentleman brought forward a Bill that had never been discussed before. It had been shoved in his hand by one of the Tory Whips. He was not too sure what it was about and not only had he got it all wrong, he had got the title wrong." That situation is relatively new in Parliament. Although this Government are capable of doing anything, it is a bit much that they have got the title wrong. After all, this is really a Government Bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Skinner: I am trying to explain this because it is an important issue. Indeed, it is an important issue for people in your area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it is all about smoke and pollution.

I suggest that we say, "The Government have brought in this measure but they do not know A from a bull's foot. We have tried to explain to the few colleagues who were in the Chamber what it was all about and they are aware of the circumstances. Although you might be in favour of the generality of the Bill, there is good reason to consider whether we should vote the matter down because the whole thing is technically absurd." A question arises on——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I wonder whether the hon. Member could contain himself until perhaps he catches my eye. Then he could make the speech that he is seeking to make now in an intervention. Interventions should be brief.

Mr. Skinner: The matter is important. This is not just any ordinary day. Mr. Speaker explained that it was very unusual. He went even further: he said that he did not like it. Then he left. Now you have got it. To be honest, I think you are in a predicament. Whereas normally Members of Parliament vote on the principle of a measure——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The predicament is the length of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. Perhaps he will save some of it up for when he catches my eye.

10.30 am

Mr. Stanbrook: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a point of substance here. It is, with respect, one for resolution by the Chair. If we are being asked to say that a section of an Act should be repealed when in fact we are only amending it, what is to cure that obvious error at this stage?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman surprises me. The word "repeal", which is in the Bill as it stands, has already been approved by the House on Second Reading and it has not been challenged until now.

Mr. Stanbrook: On Second Reading, the wording was the other way round. We are being asked to change the order of the wording.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill that is before the House was approved on Second Reading. It says that it is a Bill

"To repeal section 16(1)(a) of the Clean Air Act 1956 and to amend section 1 of the Clean Air Act 1968."

The amendment that we are debating is to leave out the word "repeal" in the original Bill and to replace it with the word "amend." The word "repeal" was in the Bill that was before the House on Second Reading and it was approved by the House.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am genuinely trying to be helpful. I have listened to what appears to be a substantial degree of confusion. My starting point is that legislation in haste and without adequate notice is often legislation for which later one has some cause for regret. I assume that there is no particular need for emergency legislation in this case. The current legislation has lasted a long time.

My question—a simple question of guidance—to you is this. Having come before the House with amendments that are of some significance, of which there has been little or no notice, would it be possible—out of courtesy to the House and to ensure that every hon. Member is able to examine and, if necessary, to take advice from whichever outside sources are relevant and that have an interest in the matter—for the promoter of the Bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was here at the beginning of our proceedings. Had he been here, he would recall that what he is saying now is similar to points of order that were raised with Mr. Speaker and that were dealt with by him. Mr. Speaker pointed out that, although what we are doing may be unusual and that he might regret it, none the less it was in order. The amendment has been selected as being in order. The hon. Gentleman has expressed an opinion. It may be an opinion that I share, but that is not a matter for me to decide. The opinion that the hon. Gentleman has expressed is one that the House must make its judgment on, not me.

Mr. Anderson: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not the point that I am seeking to make. I am sure that your views, although very cogent for some of us on the substance of the Bill, are not relevant. The point is surely this: since Mr. Speaker made his ruling, events have moved on. The amount of debate shows that hon. Members feel some concern. The simple question is this: is it now technically possible, in the light of the debate that has taken place since Mr. Speaker gave his ruling, for the

[Mr. Anderson]

promoter of the Bill, out of courtesy to the House—because, as you can see, this is, at the very least, a highly unusual issue and we have to be wary of creating precedents in this or any other matter—to say, "I will pull up stumps at this stage and seek to adjourn the debate and come back, after due notice, to the House?" Given the nature of the amendment, it may even be that due notice is seven days or 14 days, but——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman said that he was raising a point of order, but he is now making a long speech. I think that I can deal with the matter. Of course it will be open to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) who moved the amendments to seek the leave of the House to withdraw them, but that would be a matter for the House, not for the Chair, to decide. Alternatively, if the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) is saying that, for whatever reason, hon. Members, both inside and outside the Chamber, have had insufficient time to consider the implications of the amendments, that is a matter for argument and debate. It may be an argument that the hon. Gentleman will seek to deploy later in an attempt to persuade the House that it should reject the amendments until further consideration can be given to their effect.

Mr. Anderson: I concede that perhaps I strayed into the realms of argument and that that is a matter that I can properly deploy in the Third Reading debate. May I ask a simple question? If, in the light of the debate, the mover of the amendments were to come to the conclusion that he should withdraw now and pull up stumps, or whatever the appropriate expression may be, would he be able to bring the Bill back to the House for further debate after due notice?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. We should then proceed to debate the Third Reading of the Bill, and it would be for the House to decide whether to give the Bill a Third Reading. We are all familiar with the fact that Bills that have been the subject of comment in the House but that have not necessarily, for whatever reason, at that point been amended, can be amended in another place, or their Lordships can be persuaded to consider amendments that may be tabled in another place.

Mr. Powell: I am becoming not only confused but bemused and aggravated. I am very worried. What worries me most of all is you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When a point of order was raised by the hon. Member for Orpington, you had to consult the document to amend your ruling. That illustrates to me——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have not amended any ruling.

Mr. Powell: Then the observations that you were making on it. We have all had to do that this morning—even you, with your knowledge and expertise in the Chair. What we ought to be doing now is a very worrying problem. It is causing embarrassment to the sponsors of the Bill and those who are discussing it. Even Mr. Speaker this morning was not, I assume, eager to suggest that the amendment should be accepted on a verbal basis.

For the benefit of those hon. Members who have joined us since 9.30, you highlighted the fact that first word of the Bill—"repeal"—is to be amended and that the word "amend" is to be inserted instead of the word "repeal". We have to consider the effect of the Bill as a result of the insertion of that one word. That is the reason for the dilemma. The whole thread and trend of my speech is now in shreds. I am having great difficulty in trying to pull all the threads together in dealing with the amendments.

I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) half an hour ago that I had not made up my mind whether I wanted the word "repeal" to be accepted or the word "amend." Now I am not sure whether either word should be accepted, or even whether we should be debating the matter any further. Perhaps we should reject the Bill altogether, and that creates another dilemma. As a Whip, I know that when hon. Members arrive at night directly from meetings, they ask, "In which corridor shall we go—left or right, Noes or Ayes?" and we have to advise them, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Skinner: A few weeks ago, when the title of the Bill was different, I would have advised hon. Members to go into one Lobby, but since a different Bill has been pesented to us this morning, a Bill that went through on the nod in a different fashion, I would advise the opposite. That shows the nature of the Bill. Within a few weeks, that Bill has not been amended but has been totally and utterly changed. That is the burden of my hon. Friend's argument.

Mr. Powell: What my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover has said is extremely important. Imagine the scene when you call a Division on the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and hon. Members are herded into the corridors and say, "In which Lobby shall we vote?" As it is a private Member's Bill, there should be no Whip advising them. There is certainly no Whip on the Opposition Benches.

Hon. Members will come in, all confused and ask where to go, and be told, "You can vote Aye for a repeal, you can vote Aye for amendment, or you can go into the No Lobby." They will ask, "What are we doing in the No Lobby?", and be told, "We are voting on two verbal amendments that have been tabled this morning.".

That will all happen in the space of eight minutes, in which hon. Members have to get here from their offices which may be in Norman Shaw or Abbey gardens. They will run in with their shoes untied and their ties undone to get here in eight minutes to be confronted with a dilemma as to which way they should vote. Are we to send them into the Lobby to vote on one amendment or both amendments, and how will we explain to them the effect of that on the entire Bill which, in all probability they have not seen because it was hurriedly put through?

Mr. Anderson: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work as a Whip. As an hon. Member representing a Welsh constituency, I have never had any doubt as to which Lobby to choose. I have never needed to ask my hon. Friend for an explanation, I had only to look at him. I recall coming in from the bath, scantily clad. I did not ask my hon. Friend for advice, I simply looked at him. The advice he invariably gave me since I first entered the House as, "When in doubt, vote Labour." I have faithfully followed that advice. One never need ask for explanations from my hon. Friend, one just looks at his eyebrows, which have been eloquent enough.

10.45 am

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend makes very kind remarks, but on this occasion, if a Division is called, my eyes will have to be cast to the floor because I would not be able to advise hon. Members by giving them directions with my eyes because I do not know whether they should be going into the Aye Lobby or the No Lobby.

I shall get on with my speech, but I do not feel that I can make the speech that I wanted to make about the amendments; I will have to wait for Third Reading because the remarks that I want to make may be interpreted as out of order. I represent a mining constituency. In 1979, it had seven collieries employing some 5,000 miners. The mining industry in Ogmore employed some 7,000 people in total. All the collieries were closed, so all the miners' homes which used to have smoke coming from their chimneys because of the allocation of free coal—although the free coal has stopped, tradition dies very hard in Wales, especially in my constituency and people still burn free coal—may be affected by the Bill as those people might be breaking the law if smoke is emitted from their chimneys.

Mr. Win Griffiths: My hon. Friend has probably received a number of representations about the problem of free coal. Because of the way in which British Coal is amending the scheme, it is becoming less likely that miners will convert their homes to gas or other completely smokeless fuels, but will continue to use their free coal allocation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating that. We are debating whether a word should be deleted from the Bill and replaced by another word.

Mr. Powell: I appreciate what my hon. Friend says. It is very relevant to whether we replace the word "repeal" with the word "amend" in the title of the Bill as that will have a considerable effect on the Clean Air Act 1956, and section 1 of the Clean Air Act 1968. Those of us who have studied those Acts in depth and in detail because we are genuinely concerned about the environment—unlike the green goddess at No. 10—were concerned about the Clean Air Act long before 1979, and were affected by it even before the legislation was introduced in 1956 and 1968.

I illustrated that by describing my walk from Willesden to Acton at the tender age of 17 in all the fog and smog in London. I should be claiming from someone for the continual bouts of bronchitis I have suffered, not because I worked down the mines but because I have had a chest complaint ever since I was 17.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central); I should be happy to advise my hon. Friend about a claim for pneumoconiosis should he wish to claim some compensation for his chest complaint. I, too, am quite concerned about the Clean Air Act, as I also represent a mining constituency. If we vote against the amendments, we should be left with the Bill in its present form. Would that mean that section 16 of the Clean Air Act 1956 would be repealed, or would it remain in place within the Bill? Having listened to most of the debate, I am in something of a dilemma as to whether the Bill in its present form will repeal or amend section 16(1) of the Clean Air Act 1956.

Mr. Powell: That is the dilemma. I see that my hon. Friend is equipped with a book containing perhaps 1,000 pages of interpretation. He has obviously had time to study the matter. He may well be far more informed than some of us who have been participating in the debate since 9.35 this morning. Having read the documents perhaps he will be able to advise us.

Mr. Skinner: I am prepared to vote in order to produce that dilemma, because there is nothing wrong with the Opposition attempting to destabilise the Government. However, there is another way of attempting to find an answer to the problem. Unfortunately, that is difficult now. We could have consulted a barrister but they are on a go-slow—cacanny as they say in Scotland. There would be no point in approaching a run-of-the-mill solicitor because they have fallen out with the barristers. In fact, they will not sit with them on the Tory Benches. Therefore, there is a dilemma, and we should look at it from a layman and a laywoman's point of view.

Mr. Anderson: Layperson.

Mr. Skinner: Yes.

We should use our native gut instinct and vote the amendments down. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) could then read his Bill—he has not had a chance to read it because the Whips shoved it into his hand. They took it from the Government shelf. We could then have a fresh crack at it and support a measure which is environmentally and technically clean.

Mr. Powell: I accept the advice of my hon. Friend. Nevertheless, we should debate which way we should vote. With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, despite all the advice afforded us by both you and Mr. Speaker, we are still in a dilemma. If we were to stop the debate now and say that we will vote on the basis of the discussions we have had so far, we would not know which Lobby to enter. We would not know whether to insert the word "amend" or leave the word "repeal". I return to the same argument I put to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, the repeal of section 16(1) of the 1956 Act would be rather strong.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is sweeping.

Mr. Powell: Yes, it is sweeping. I do not think that the environmentalists who have turned up to debate the matter would be eager to see that. Therefore, we are in a dilemma as to whether "amend" is the right word. We are facing great difficulties even on advising people on amendment No. 1. The difficulties have resulted from the way in which the amendments were thrown at us at 9 o'clock this morning.

Mr. Anderson *rose*——

Mr. Powell: I want to get on with my speech. I have been delayed by interventions and I have a speech to deliver on this important issue. If we can resolve the dilemma, I could ensure that my speech is recorded.

Mr. Anderson: The most important point mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) is the way in which the amendments have been thrown at us. I am trying to think of a compromise——

Mr. Skinner: I hate that word.

Mr. Anderson: I shall try to think of another word to satisfy my hon. Friend. Perhaps "middle way"?

Mr. Skinner: Solution.

Mr. Anderson: I am trying to think of a solution which might satisfy both sides of the House. Since the Bill improves the environment, albeit in a limited way, it would be wrong to block it.

If the Bill were to be withdrawn now and within a reasonable time there were to be adequate environmental and technical explanations of the need for it, on its reintroduction would my hon. Friend give the Bill a fair wind so that it can be enacted by the end of the Session? Would that not be a fair way of meeting both sides in this matter?

Mr. Powell: I accept my hon. Friend's point. If the amendments were to be withdrawn, we could get on with the debate on the Bill itself.

As an environmentalist, I am concerned about pollution. However, there is another Bill on the Order paper for which I prepared a speech—the Sunday Trading (Reform) Bill. I had hoped that we would have reached that by now, because I stayed up late last night preparing for it. I am also interested in the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill, but, because of these amendments, we have been thrown into a dilemma and have been delayed for an hour and a half. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover said, we may have been able to call on the other place for advice. However, as a result of the Government's attitude and policies to the health workers, railway workers, transport workers and now the judges and the Law Lords, everybody is in dispute. The country is in turmoil, and on arriving here at 9·30 on a Friday morning to discuss the control of smoke pollution, we find that the House is in turmoil.

Mr. Win Griffiths: My hon. Friend has mentioned the turmoil being caused by the Government. He omitted to mention that the proposals for the National Health Service are causing turmoil in the medical profession. My hon. Friend also mentioned the severe chest problems from which he suffers as a result of pollution. Therefore, there are far more substantive issues with which we should deal, but we cannot do so because of the way in which the Bill has been presented to us and the mistakes that have been made.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. If we can prevent smoke being ejected from industrial and domestic units, it would clean the air and should stop some of the health problems with which we are faced now and the expense of curing them. We should be looking at that closely.

I was considering this matter last night and was in a dilemma as to whether I should seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to speak on this Bill or whether I should wait for the Sunday Trading (Reform) Bill. I am sponsored by the union representing shopworkers and therefore, I have an interest in that Bill.

Hon. Members have sought your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on what to do with the amendments. We have received certain legal advice from the hon. Member for Orpington, but we are still in a dilemma. We shall not make progress unless the hon. Member for Basingstoke withdraws the amendments; until he does so, the matter will not be resolved. Hon. Members have said, in points of order and interventions, that that is the only way out.

11 am

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) mentioned health hazards caused by smoke pollution, which affect us all. I look forward this afternoon to driving down the M4 or catching a train from Paddington to the fresh air and beauty of Wales. In Wales, I do not have to wear an oxygen mask, which some hon. Members use in London. There is a particular need for smoke control in cities. Hon. Members are concerned about pollution, and had the amendments not been thrown at us this morning we would probably have made short speeches in support of the Bill, which we believe could be effective and helpful to people. I want more smokeless zones and less smoke emitted into the atmosphere.

We should be debating smoke emitted not only by domestic homes or industrial units but by farmers burning stubble, where black smoke is emitted and——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This has nothing to do with the amendments.

Mr. Powell: I am loth to question your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the title of the Bill is

"To repeal section 16(1)(a) of the Clean Air Act 1956 and to amend section 1 of the Clean Air Act 1968."

We are debating smoke emission from chimneys, industrial units and other places. I am questioning whether we should repeal or amend——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was talking about smoke emission from farmers burning stubble.

Mr. Powell: I was talking about the extension of the offence of emitting dark smoke from industrial or trade premises. Some farm units are industrial units. I have been on trains when dark smoke has blocked the entire railway track. Indeed, I have travelled on the M4 when the same has happened as a result of industrial waste being burnt on farms.

Mr. Anderson: My hon. Friend has mentioned one of the most important sources of dark smoke. If I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on Third Reading, I should like to deal with the definition of dark smoke. Some major polluters have been omitted from the Bill, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) should consider whether there is anything sinister in that. Has there been a conspiracy to omit from the Bill major polluters and to deal only with——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot debate these matters on the amendments.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) is right. The Bill should define black or white smoke.

When one travels on the train to Didcot, one sees electricity power stations that have large chimneys. When white smoke is being emitted, it does not look too bad, but sometimes they emit black smoke. The difficulty is how to define black or grey smoke. Who will define it? Are there sufficient inspectors to ensure that offences are not committed? I have a 40-page document——

Mrs. Dunwoody: Read it out.

Mr. Powell: I shall not read it all. It is produced by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and clearly shows a

reduction in the number of inspectors. I do not want to aggravate matters because I can see you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, shuffling in your chair.

Mr. Harry Greenway: The hon. Gentleman has touched on the difference between black and white smoke, which is fundamental to the Bill. The wide-ranging effects of the amendments encompass——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is nothing in the amendments that varies the colour of the smoke that should be subject to the legislation.

Mr. Greenway: May I make my point? I was——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard sufficient of the hon. Gentleman's point to understand it.

Mr. Greenway: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

Mr. Greenway: I am not——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman wants to persuade the House of his argument he should try to catch my eye in the usual way instead of persisting with an intervention that I have said is not compatible with the rules of order.

Mr. Powell: The way in which the amendments have been moved this morning has aggravated hon. Members. We are all on tenterhooks because we do not know whether we are in order. We must therefore be guided by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to get on and deal with the Sunday Trading (Reform) Bill.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Before the intervention of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) made an important point. If we pass the amendments, the Bill will become different. There is also the issue of the inspectorate. What is the point of passing the Bill in its amended form if we do not have the inspectors to ensure that the Bill is carried out? Even if the Bill is passed unamended, we shall need more inspectors. If the amendments are carried, there is an argument about whether we need more or fewer inspectors. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) should give us some facts and figures about the inspectorate, so that we can determine the best way to proceed.

Mr. Powell: The penultimate paragraph of the explanatory memorandum says:

"The Bill has no financial effects or effects on public service manpower."

I have read and re-read the Bill and it is obvious that there must be more inspectors to draw to the attention of the people concerned the extension of the offence of emitting dark smoke from industrial and trade premises. In such circumstances, I assume that the people involved would be prosecuted. My hon. Friend has made a relevant point. If we do not have more inspectors, the inspectorate will not be able to carry out its obligations under the Clean Air Act 1968.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Would my hon. Friend care to speculate on the desirability of repealing section 16(1)(a) of the Clean Air Act 1956? If it was repealed rather than amended, we could produce amendments to incorporate the Ringelman scale which, as my hon. Friend knows, is the scale used to test whether an offence has been committed when smoke is emitted from steam locomotives. As my hon. Friend knows, I have some considerable experience in these matters. I hope that my hon. Friend will dwell for a little while on the argument about whether repeal would be better. I have the Clean Air Act 1956 in front of me; section 16 provides no definition of black, white or grey smoke. Some adequate definition should be inserted.

Mr. Powell: I am glad that my hon. Friend is here to give us that advice. If he had been here earlier, he might have been able to resolve our one-and-a-half-hour discussion. We could have listened to his advice and we could then have talked about amendment or repeal. He has convinced me that we were not clear about which it should be.

I have had some experience of British Rail. I talked before about walking to Old Oak common railway depot in London, which serviced most of the western region of British Rail. Some hon. Members have said that I have always pushed a pen, but in fact I used to use a 2 ft shovel on British Rail to shovel coal into an engine from a tender which had a 28-ft firebox. The smoke that used to come out was black when we were at Paddington, but it would be white on the way down to Penzance and Plymouth. If we were to repeal section 16, we could table many amendments to provide a definition. That would please you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we would then clearly be in order in having a full debate on a proper definition of grey smoke, black smoke and white smoke.

Mr. Anderson: I want to bring my hon. Friend back to the amendments, which will please you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He has done well to keep within their constraints. He pointed out that it is rather implausible to believe that the Bill will have no financial effects on public service manpower. That bald and implausible statement related to the Bill in its original form. We have not heard from the Government or any other source whether the amendments will, in themselves, have repercussions on the need for public service manpower.

If the Bill is a coherent whole, to alter one part may lead to the alteration of other parts, so the whole exercise this morning is misconceived. I ask my hon. Friend to consider the point about the implausibility of there being no financial effects on public service manpower and also the possible differences of amendment or appeal on the need for public service manpower.

11.15 pm

Mr. Powell: That is a relevant point because, as I quoted earlier, the Bill suggests that there will be no financial effects on public service manpower.

Mr. Anderson: That is nonsense.

Mr. Powell: I agree that that is nonsense.

Ms. Walley: I feel that somehow or other the House will have to find a solution to our present predicament. There is the question how, if there were to be a Division, we would explain to those Members who are either away from the Chamber or who have not taken part in the debate how they should vote on the two amendments. We have no way of knowing how the amendments will change the details of the Bill and we do not know the implications for

[Ms. Walley]

manpower—or personpower, I should say. We have just had a sanitised annual report from the inspectorate of pollution—and I hoped to refer to it on Third Reading —which gives details of the way in which the inspectorate is under-resourced, demoralised and unable to carry out its work on air pollution.

We are in a dilemma. How are we to tell other hon. Members what is happening? How will the general public know what is happening when they hear our arguments on "Today in Parliament"? Our confusion and dilemma are indicative of the Government's confusion on environmental issues. For that reason, I urge Opposition Members to do all that they can to establish a proper environmental protection agency—which a Labour Government will do —and I urge the Minister or the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) to come forward with specific proposals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is supposed to be an intervention.

Mr. Powell: My right hon. Friend—I should have said my hon. Friend, but she will be my right hon. Friend before long—has made a timely intervention, which is a request for some help from the Government to resolve our dilemma, if it is possible to obtain help from the Government when the House is placed in a dilemma on private Members' Bills. It was not only an intervention but a plea made in the hope that——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is seeking to catch my eye. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman might consider bringing his remarks to a conclusion so that the Minister can do as he asks.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that there is no preferential treatment for Ministers. This is essentially a day for Back Benchers and I should not like to see any preference given to a Minister, as often happens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) was expressing the hope that the Minister would give the House some guidance. In case the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) had not noticed, I was merely pointing out that the Minister was seeking to do exactly what the hon. Member for Ogmore wanted. Whether he terminates his speech to allow the Minister to intervene is a matter for him and the Chair.

Mr. Powell: I am glad that you said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Since I started my speech on the amendments, I have been trying to get the Minister to intervene. I do not wish to delay the House any longer. I hope that I will catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after the Minister has spoken so that I can give my speech on Third Reading.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying matters. He mentioned the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. Perhaps he will comment on the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) and show that it is pointless for legislation of this kind to proceed while the Government are in such a mess over the air division. During the recent debate on the Consolidated Fund, the Minister admitted that there was disarray and that the chief inspector of air pollution and other senior inspectors had resigned. Reorganisation is proceeding in the air division and there is absolute turmoil. Perhaps my hon. Friend will refer in detail to the document which he mentioned earlier, thereby enlightening the House as to what needs to be done.

Mr. Powell: I notice that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) has a copy of the report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, about which I could go into some detail. On reading the report last night I found that one senior inspector had resigned. Mr. Brian Ponsford was responsible for the report's preparation. Its implications for the Bill will be profound. Scales of promotion, remuneration and qualifications have been reported upon and a number of qualified inspectors will no longer enjoy their former conditions of service. I do not understand how they can monitor what is happening at present, let alone in future, if their work load is increased.

Ms. Walley: In view of the issue as to how smoke control can be monitored, I am happy to have an opportunity to show the crisis that exists within HMIP. On air pollution legislation, the sanitised version of the first annual report says:

"Inspectors made 9,134 visits to or in connection with scheduled works in 1987-88 (8,723 in 1987) compared with 9,391 in 1986."

It is plain that there has been a substantial decline in the number of inspections. The report continues:

This is in line with the targeted figure of 9,000. In several districts shortage of Inspectors or the need for introductory training for new Inspectors meant that some works did not receive a visit during the year."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Briefly.

Ms. Walley: I shall be brief, Sir. Even more important, an unsanitised version of the report, in which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) will be interested, states——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief and relevant.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend's points were relevant, as is the unsanitised version, which she has passed to me, because it covers the whole inspectorate. I read that document last night because I thought that I might be lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to speak not on the amendments but on the Bill in general. The document refers to the reorganisation of HMIP and new legislation which will increase the inspectors' workload. It states:

"The proposed reorganisation provides only six middle management field posts to do the work which at present is being performed by sixteen people; comparison with Scotland where there has been a staff inspection within the last two years shows that, even without the additional work resulting from the new legislation, eighteen middle management posts would be realistic."

That was only the second paragraph. The third states:

"The long term objective of having all inspectors working from three Regional offices in Industry Groups would result in inefficiency from excess travelling and give less inspection at a given cost, at the same time there would be less liaison with Local Authorities and a lack of the local knowledge which exists at present."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I am reluctant to intervene. I have listened with great care to the hon.

Gentleman for the past hour and three quarters. It may help him to move towards the conclusion of his important remarks if I clarify the point that the Bill has no effects for HMIP; it would be environmental health officers who would be involved. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman to move to a conclusion so that I have the opportunity later to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Anderson: I should like——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There should be no interventions in interventions.

Mr. Powell: Yes——

Mr. Anderson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Powell: I give way.

Mr. Anderson: I should like to follow that point. Although there is a crisis in the national inspectorate, the amendments relate specifically to domestic smoke and domestic pollution. As the Under-Secretary of State has properly said, the people who, without any additional manpower or expenditure, will be reluctant in this context, are not the members of the hard-pressed national inspectorate but the environmental health officers at local government level. My hon. Friend has had extensive experience of local government and is more aware than all of us of the crisis among environmental health officers at local government level. We hope that the proposals will have no effects on manpower, yet the environmental health officers, who already have additional burdens placed on them by other Government measures—that is right—will be expected to do the work without additional remuneration.

Mr. Powell: I accept my hon. Friend's important point. If we were considering the third Bill on the Order Paper, the Sunday Trading (Reform) Bill, we would be considering a similar problem for environmental health officers—how to monitor if there were Sunday opening of shops. It is ridiculous to imply that extra staff will not be needed. We reject that idea.

Ms. Walley: I feel obliged to return to what the Under-Secretary of State said—that this matter has nothing to do with HMIP but is for environmental health officers at local level. For the Minister's information, I recently tabled a series of parliamentary questions asking about the cuts in training which are causing a national shortage of environmental health officers. The Minister is nodding because, no doubt she remembers those questions. It is clear that we have a national shortage of environmental health officers throughout the country and that this problem is exacerbated by the cuts being implemented by the Department of the Environment.

I also asked a series of questions of the Institution of Environmental Health Officers so that it could show me where there is a shortfall between the numbers of posts it has on the establishment and the number which it has employed to carry out this vital work. In many cases there is as much as a 30 per cent. shortage.

Not two miles from this place, in the London borough of Lambeth, there is a shortage of environmental health officers. How on earth will it be possible for each and every local authority throughout the country to take on board the implications of the Bill, which we do not even understand because of the way in which verbal amendments have been brought to the House this morning? That is beyond my comprehension and, I repeat, is indicative of the Government's misunderstanding of the environmental issue and the crisis facing the country today.

11.30 am

Mr. Powell: I have been interested to see in the House over the past few years the knowledge and extreme capability within the Opposition, particularly on our Front Bench. The short intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) shows the House and the country the knowledgeable people we have in the Opposition—especially the women. I am grateful for that intervention and for the knowledge that my hon. Friend expounded to the Minister.

I shall not excite your wrath further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I desperately need to powder my nose. Therefore, I shall give way so that the Minister may catch your eye and speak on the amendments. I hope that you will be kind enough to allow me to speak later on Third Reading.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is no doubt right that the House should have debated these amendments at such length. We all appreciate the possible sacrifice which has been made by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) if it proves to be impossible for him to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to discuss a subject which is obviously of great concern to him.

This is an unusual way to deal with amendments, and there is no doubt that it is right that the House should give proper scrutiny to these procedures. I was not going to address the substance of the Bill in these brief remarks —hoping that I might be able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we moved to Third Reading.

The Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has the support not only of my Department but, on the basis of consultation held over some time, of virtually all the local authorities from which hon. Members present come, even if they do not all represent them. The Bill has a wide measure of support and there is no doubt, from this morning's debate on these amendments, that there is much interest in the subject. There is also some misunderstanding about the terms of the Bill. No doubt my hon. Friend, if his Bill reaches Third Reading, will explain precisely what his measures involve.

It is a source of great regret that, frankly, an error was made in the long title of the Bill. The amendments merely change the long title and do not change the substance of the Bill or its effects on section 16(1)(a) of the 1956 Act.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Is the Minister seriously suggesting that a Bill with a major defect in its title has been brought before the House in a suitable form? Is it not true that any legislation put before the House—particularly such as this, which was rushed through on Friday with no debate—should be perfect and not warrant criticism of its wording? How could highly paid parliamentary draftsmen make such elementary mistakes?

Mrs. Bottomley: It is a source of considerable regret that this error occurred in the long title. However, it does not in any way change the content of clause 1. As it stands, there is a conflict between the substance of the long title and clause 1.

Mr. Anderson *rose*——

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall finish answering the point made by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who talked about the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke secured the earlier stages of the Bill, which was unusual. There is a general understanding that there will be an opportunity for full debate to discuss the detail of this important measure on Third Reading. If the House decides that the Bill should be given a Third Reading, it will be possible to give this important measure the full scrutiny it requires.

Mr. Anderson: The House is always charitable and understanding when a Minister or any hon. Member says that a fault or error has occurred, as on this occasion. I do not wish to carry out a witch hunt, but it would be helpful to know whether this was merely a technical error by a draftsman or whether the fault lies with the Department, so that we may better understand the source of the error. Who committed the error?

Mrs. Bottomley: I cannot reply to that specific point. I hope that the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), if he studies the Bill, will appreciate that its substance is entirely unchanged.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I wish to make it abundantly clear that the House would be remiss to allow this legislation to go through without a vote. If the amendments were accepted, some people would argue that the Bill was not a bad measure, despite the fact that there is no allocation for manpower, which means that this would have to come from somewhere else. Staff would have to be taken off other jobs to look after those affected by the Bill.

It is pretty clear that a few weeks ago the Government decided to get a small Bill on the statute book that could be described as green. The Prime Minister has made various speeches up and down the country and it was obviously decided to use Parliament and a private Members' day to pass a so-called green Bill. Little or no attention was paid to the content of the Bill—merely that it should be passed.

Therefore, several Fridays ago, a Bill was taken off the shelf—it was not looked at properly, and was handed to a Back Bencher. It has reached Third Reading, and it is disgraceful that, having reached this stage, the Bill's proposer, in cahoots with the Government, had to table Third Reading verbal amendments to clean up the Bill. There is no question but that such proceedings should be totally refuted by hon. Members.

Mr. Anderson: In answering the question about whether the Bill's origin was in the Department of the Environment or with a private Member, are we not finding an answer to my question about who was at fault? If this were really a Bill conceived by a private Member, we would understand the error because we are not experts. However, the Bill was taken from the dusty shelves of the Department of the Environment, and the Minister should say, "I am at fault—please understand it is me." Is this a private Member's Bill or a Bill from the Department of the Environment?

Mr. Skinner: I have no doubt, and perhaps the indications given by the proposer of the Bill suggest, that my hon. Friend is correct. The proposer of the Bill said very little when he moved the amendments. In all the confusion, he threw no light at all on the matter. It is not the first time that that has happened. It happens quite often when Governments go to Back Benchers and say, "Do you want your name in the history books? Here is a chance. You can get this Bill through on a Friday. It is an innocuous measure and will not cause any trouble. Most Opposition Members will support it." If the Bill had been put in the proper form, that would have been the case.

The Government are now totally confused and are taking on the doctors, the Health Service, lawyers, dockers, almost every group of people in the country—and Parliament. The Prime Minister and her junior Ministers and others were not aware of what was taking place. They think that on a Friday not many people will be here and that they can get the Bill through because there will be no Opposition Members to examine it. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) has done a good job this morning. After a long argument not only with the Government but with the authorities, including the Chair, we, and especially my hon. Friend, have been able to establish that this procedure should be stopped.

Mr. Cryer: Has my hon. Friend noted that there are no members of the Liberal, SDP or other cauliflower parties here exercising the parliamentary scrutiny that they often claim is their priority right? Does he agree that one of the reasons for the procedures of the House being abused on a Friday by this seedy little conspiracy, which tries to get some sort of "green" Bill through, is that the Government are stuffing Parliament to its gills with legislation, such as the Water Bill, which will reduce anti-pollution standards? That means that they have no time to allow proper consideration for minor legislation such as this Bill. If they had any decency, they would withdraw some of the nasty big Bills and give proper time to small Bills such as this.

Mr. Skinner: That would not be a bad idea. It could be quite properly argued that the Government have caused all this confusion and heaped it on one of their Back Benchers. I do not regard him as the guilty party. There is a good argument for saying that the Bill should proceed on Monday and that the Bill for the repeal of the dock labour scheme should be dropped. That is another Bill that has been devised in haste. Perhaps the dockers should receive the same treatment as the lawyers and judges. When they threaten action at the Royal Courts of Justice, the Government run a mile and say, "We shall have to find a way out for them."

It is correct for us to make a stand on this issue. It is clear that the House has been abused in a way that I have not witnessed in all the time that I have been here. The last time that a Bill was verbally amended on Third Reading was 18 years ago. According to the authorities of the House, that was a minor correction. These amendments seek to change the title of the Bill. The Bill brought before the House several Fridays ago was quite different from this one. It was not different in style or in a few words. The title was different.

11.45 am

The Bill that had its Second Reading and went through its Committee and Report stages was not this Bill. It was a Bill to repeal a section of the Clean Air Act 1956, whereas the Bill before the House today seeks to amend

the Act to improve it. There is a mile of difference between a Bill that will repeal sections of an Act and one that seeks to amend Acts to make them better.

What would happen if I went to the Chair on Monday and said, "By the way, I have a verbal amendment that was not printed in Friday's Order Paper. I want to change the nature of Monday's debate about the dock labour scheme. Instead of repealing the scheme I want to amend it." Perhaps we should try that and seek to extend the scheme to the non-scheme ports. I wonder whether the Chair would accept that. Perhaps on Monday I can say, "Here I am, Mr. Speaker, with a couple of minor amendments. They change the title of the Dock Work Bill but they change only one word."

Mr. Anderson: Would that not have the additional benefit of avoiding strife in the ports? The dockers' leaders have made clear——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot raise that matter while we are debating the amendment.

Mr. Skinner: It may not be in order to speak about that, but if I am to convince some of my hon. Friends to make a stand on this issue I have to draw analogies between what is happening today and what could happen on other days. To all intents and purposes, this is a Government-sponsored Bill on a private Members' day and that is an abuse of the procedures of the House. The Opposition came to that conclusion in the early part of the morning. We came here to talk about something else and suddenly discovered that the Bill placed before us was totally at variance with the one that had gone through three or four Fridays ago.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): My hon. Friend has spoken about verbal amendments and their dangers. He has also spoken about how the procedure might be used on Monday for the Dock Work Bill. If the precedent is set here——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not talking about the docks. We had better leave that until Monday and stick to Friday's business.

Mr. Cohen: Perhaps we could table a verbal amendment to this Bill to say that the Employment Bill which shackles trade unions that might have an interest in smoke pollution should not apply. Perhaps that could be a precedent for the Dock Work Bill.

Mr. Skinner: I agree with my hon. Friend. I know that Mr. Deputy Speaker is a bit concerned. I know that he has been placed in a serious dilemma this morning. I was here at 9.30 and saw him come in. I saw him shaking his head and I know why. He follows the constitution perhaps more keenly than some others. It looked to me as if the Speaker was saying, "They have got me in a fine mess this morning."

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and I thought that we had come to debate a tiny straightforward Bill on smoke control, but discovered that it was completely different. Unusually, Mr. Speaker had to make a statement saying that this was almost a precedent. It has not happened for 18 years. He clearly seemed to have a problem. He said that he deprecated the use of this procedure. In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich and I, he also said that he understood why my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore might have to argue on a wider basis than on the narrow terms of the amendment. It is fairly easy to understand why that is so. If someone went to the Vote Office a few days ago and thought that the Bill there was the one going through and then found that it was not, it is clear that he would have a problem.

If on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report the promoter of the Bill had aroused a discussion and there had been a debate about the previous Bill, hon. Members and the Speaker could have argued for a narrow debate today. However, not a word has been spoken on the alternative Bill and it is obvious that the Speaker and the authorities realised that they had played a blinder.

Therefore, we must now seriously consider whether we can—I am speaking now to Opposition Members and any Conservative Members who are interested in the constitution and the House—support the amendments, albeit that the Bill in its entirety might be fine when produced properly. Should we allow, for purely constitutional purposes, the amendments to go through? Would it not be right and proper for somebody to make a stand and divide on the amendment so that we can demonstrate to those outside the House that we did not allow the Government-sponsored chicanery to pass without making a stand?

Mr. Cohen: I am still concerned, because, as my hon. Friend has rightly said, the Bill went through Second Reading and Committee without any word being spoken about it. That was presumably because, without the amendments, the House accepted that it was a good Bill. However, the amendments fundamentally alter the Bill, because, for example, section 16(1)*(a)* of the Clean Air Act 1956 exempted chimneys that produced smoke that was deemed to be a statutory nuisance. Under the unamended Bill owners of chimneys creating a nuisance would no longer be able to get away with it, but because of the words "to amend" they can continue to create a nuisance. The problem is that there has not been a statement about that during the debate and no one has explained why they should be allowed to continue to create a nuisance. Does my hon. Friend consider that that is a serious point?

Mr. Skinner: It is a serious point, because when the Bill was presented it was not debated, and when it was brought here today it was not explained. Now the Minister has been on her feet and, because she wants to be careful about her rising up the greasy pole on the ministerial Bench, she would not commit herself completely on the issue. Why? The watchword is: "When confusion reigns, keep your trap shut." That is why the hon. Lady did not explain—this is what my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) tried to explain—the difference between "amend" and "repeal". Because Opposition Members are concerned about the constitution, we want to know what the words would have meant and what they now mean in their new context.

Mr. Anderson: Is not another possible explanation for the Minister's reticence and surprising brevity that, if she had spoken longer, she might have revealed all? She would have revealed the fact that the Bill is in fact a Department of the Environment Bill and not a private Member's Bill. She was keen not to go beyond the strict confines of her brief so as to avoid revealing the Bill's true origin.

Mr. Skinner: I do not doubt that. Just imagine her going to see the Secretary of State for the Environment and saying, "I have had a tidy time in there today and I am afraid that I made a slight error." He says to her, "I have not been around. I have been in my own back yard. I am not sure what has been happening this week. I have been dealing with planning matters in the north and in Gloucestershire. I have been trying to ward off all those people who want to invade my privacy, even though I shall vote against those Bills next Friday." She then says, "I am afraid I went too far. We had a Bill off the Government shelf that dealt with the environment which we thought would please the Prime Minister who has this new green image." As I said earlier, some people in my area said it was a mouldy image, but that is another story. She says to the Secretary of State, "What happened was that we brought forward a Bill that was upside down and, rather than explain it to the House, I thought that I had better keep my mouth shut."

Mrs. Dunwoody *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: I think that my hon. Friend wants to embroider that point.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does not my hon. Friend understand that what happened was much simpler than that? The Minister is the only woman in the Department; she is intelligent and she knows what she is doing. They have mucked the Bill up, and the Government have given it to her to straighten out.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend used to be in a Government Department and I am prepared to accept what she has said. It is just conceivable that she has taken one off the shelf before.

Mrs. Dunwoody: No, I have not.

Mr. Skinner: It is just a possibility. My hon. Friend, however, knows the way in which the machinery works. There is no doubt in my mind—it has been confirmed now —that the Government are behind all the confusion. I think that we must lay it at their door.

Mr. Cohen: On the question of drafting, does my hon. Friend agree that the reason why the Minister has this horrible job this morning is that the Department of the Environment realises that it has made a great mess of it and it has given the woman the worst job, as is always the case in this life? Does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps the Secretary of State for the Environment had a role in this matter, because, after all, he was responsible for the Housing Bill? The Secretary of State is reported to have said, when that Bill was before the House, that he thought that it was a wonderful Bill because he had drafted it himself. However, because it was such a mess, it had 400 to 500 amendments made to it before it passed through Committee. Could it be that he had a hand in drafting the Bill?

Mr. Skinner: There are many ways of looking at it, but I think that there are two main ones. The Bill was drafted with him hanging over it and the fag ash dropped on the wording. That is how we got the wrong wording. It was obliterated by the fag ash. The other alternative was that he was out one day in the park picking up litter. The Prime Minister was at his side and he had a bag. They were putting litter into the bag in St. James's park and, as he was rummaging through the bag, because his fag had dropped into it, he pulled out a bit of paper—it was the Bill. That is where it came from. I tend to think that it was probably the first proposition. However, despite all the hilarity that might be caused, a Government-sponsored Bill was presented to the House calling upon us to repeal the Clean Air Act, but, when we came here today we were told, "We did not mean that; we only wanted to amend it."

I have been discussing this matter with some of my hon. Friends, and we believe that it would be worthwhile considering voting against the amendments. That would not be on the basis of whether they are good or bad, but it would be a way in which we could register our disapproval at the way in which the Bill has been dealt with. If we do not do that, the history books will record that we took part in it and, in all the confusion that reigned, it will be recorded that we connived and allowed the Bill to go through when we all know that it would be better if the Bill were presented in its proper form on another day.

I believe that no one who has spoken or intervened would not give a fair wind to the general idea that is contained within the Bill if it came back to us properly drawn up, either next Friday or the Friday after. There are several more weeks to go before the end of this Session. It would still have time to go through its procedures—in the sleepy den in the other place—that is if it can get rid of the football passes Bill—and then become law. If we allow the Bill to go through without registering disapproval of the amendments, we shall have been a party to the same kind of connivance into which the Government have entered with the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter).

12 noon

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that Parliament ought not to have double standards—one for the Government and one for Back Benchers? If we accept this precedent without objecting or voting, should we not try the same trick on Monday? The Government's standard would surely not apply to Opposition Back Benchers. If we wanted to amend the Dock Work Bill on Monday, we would not be allowed to table amendments then. If there is to be consistency, right hon. and hon. Members should reject the Government's shabby manoeuvre.

Mr. Anderson: My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) puts his finger on an important point. If, contrary to our inclinations, we give way and are not true to our role, perhaps the Government will give way on Monday and accept a similar amendment not to repeal but to amend the Dock Work Bill.

Mr. Skinner: From time to time I have been involved in negotiations with others in the House, but it is a bit of a tall order to ask me to make it my job between now and Monday to negotiate with the Government about repealing the dock labour scheme. On Monday, it will be our job to attempt that through the Authority of the Chair. The Chair should be warned that some right hon. and hon. Members may try that procedure.

It is not a bad idea to alert those of my hon. Friends who are sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, and who are more closely allied with the issue, of what happened today and that a new system has developed. They should be informed that, contrary to the

practice of the past 18 years, one can now change the title of a Bill, and that instead of repealing legislation, one can amend it. We should alert our colleagues.

Mr. Anderson: And raise points of order.

Mr. Skinner: There is no question that we should raise points of order. We shall call upon the Chair to accept amendments to the Dock Work Bill when it is debated on Monday. If we did that, the Bill could be modified to include all non-scheme ports, which would ensure that everyone enjoyed the same conditions of work in ports throughout Britain. As there has been no industrial trouble at the ports over many years, the chances are that there would be relative—I say relative—industrial peace throughout the industry. In that way, we would serve a very useful purpose.

The more that I think about it, the more I am convinced that this change of procedure can provide us with great opportunities in future. I am beginning to think about all the Bills that are to come before the House, and in particular——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Sufficient has been said about docks. Right hon. and hon. Members should concentrate on the amendments before the House.

Mr. Skinner: When considering whether I agree to repeal or amend a Bill, I can only do so on the basis of whether that is right for the Bill before the House and whether it is correct parliamentary practice. I cannot look at it in any other way. I must ask myself, "Is it right for those acting on behalf of the Government to take such action?" We all know that the Government are behind the Bill, otherwise they would have denied it. In the new parliamentary straits in which we find ourselves, it is right to consider whether this new procedure would be appropriately adopted not only on Monday but on many other occasions.

Shortly we may have before us what is known as the other private Member's Bill procedure. I want to know whether under that Bill it will be possible, once the Bill has passed through all its other stages, to amend or repeal the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill and the Associated British Ports (Hull) Bill. Mr. Deputy Speaker knows something about that subject because he comes under the general auspices of Chairman of Ways and Means. Perhaps he can give an answer off the top of his head. However, in view of what happened this morning, he may have to study the books. I shall not develop that point but will throw it in as a sprat to catch a mackerel on another day.

Mr. Cohen: Could not the same procedure be used for the Dock Work Bill as is being used today? Instead of repealing the dock labour scheme, it could be amended by enhancing trade union rights and increasing pay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must wait until next week to do that. We cannot debate next week's business today.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is getting pretty excited at the prospect that I hold out. Those right hon. and hon. Members who have served the House for the past 18 years have never seen such a procedure used before. Some of us study "Erskine May" but obviously we have missed some bits. However, I have since discovered that on the last occasion that the procedure was used it involved a non-controversial measure and did not involve totally changing that Bill. The last time that the verbal amendment procedure was used the measure concerned was, by comparason with the Bill before the House, of a comparatively minor nature. However, the amendments now before the House would turn the Bill upside down. A wide procedural gate has been opened, and those of us who take account of parliamentary procedures will exploit it in future.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): My hon. Friend refers to the problems of dealing with a private Member's Bill that is basically a Government Bill in disguise. Shortly we shall be debating a similar private Member's Bill concerning weights and measures that also appears to be a Government Bill in disguise. When we come to consider the amendments to that Bill, can we be sure——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House cannot debate now a Bill that appears later on the Order Paper.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend makes a reasonable point, and her remarks are not really out of order when one considers them against the background of the Government-sponsored Control of Smoke Pollution Bill, which my hon. Friend knows has changed. She arrives at the House this morning primarily to debate weights and measures and suddenly finds herself embroiled in a constitutional wrangle or crisis. Naturally she asks herself whether the same arguments apply to the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill. I can give my hon. Friend another piece of news. I have heard that the Government told the Conservative Member responsible for the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill to bobby off. [HON. MEMBERS: "Never."] I know that I am not supposed to speak to that Bill, but I mention in passing that we first find ourselves debating a completely different Bill, and then encounter, in respect of the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill, another example of chicanery. The Conservative Member who was to speak to that Bill entered the Chamber, looking active and as though he was ready to progress it, but after a few minutes the word came through the grapevine of this gentleman's club——

Mrs. Dunwoody: There are also some good women in it.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, on this side of the House.

Mr. Anderson: Be charitable.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Lady has been quiet: she will not tell us what the amendment is all about.

In this other bit of chicanery, the hon. Gentleman has been told to go away because the Government are happy to see this happen. I do not think any of the amendments will be discussed, and no doubt I shall be proved right.

Mr. Anderson: I know that my hon. Friend is always very understanding of Conservative Members. Having criticised the hon. Gentleman who withdrew his Weights and Measures Bill, will he pay tribute to the other side of the coin—the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), who must have been subjected to the same Government pressure but who has stood his ground? That, surely, is tremendously to his credit. Despite all the blandishments, the possible preferment, the greasy pole, the knighthoods —whatever he may have been offered—the hon. Gentleman is determined to bring forward his Bill.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has been suggested several times that the Weights and Measures Bill has been withdrawn. So far that is only a rumour, but I wonder whether as a matter of courtesy to you—and hence to the House—the promoter has given formal notice of withdrawal? I raise the question as one who has taken the trouble to put down several amendments in the expectation of debating them. What action can you take, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Bill's Second Reading is not moved and the promoter has simply drifted off in contempt of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have received no formal notification. We may be indulging in speculation and feeding on rumour. We had better wait until we reach the relevant Bill and discover whether the promoter is here to move his motion.

Mr. Skinner: According to some authorities, they have been informed that at the appropriate time today an attempt will be made to move the Bill to another day.

My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) wanted me to compliment the hon. Member for Basingstoke on having stood his ground. I think that my hon. Friend should look beyond today.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke is sat patiently with this Government Bill in his hand—well, a different Bill from the one that he had the other Friday—and I think that there is a possibility that he will be made a Whip. I have seen this happen before on a Friday. I have seen Conservative Members talk out a Bill and be promoted. I could name a few. They come into the Chamber late and talk Bills out; the next minute they are in the Whips' Office. Whether that is a promotion is neither here nor there. Hon. Members may finish up bringing in the snooker cue once a month with a message from the Queen. Is that a better job? It is certainly better paid, but I would regard it as something of a hack's job. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Basingstoke is really after that sort of promotion, but no doubt he will get his due reward.

Mr. Cohen: I take my hon. Friend's point. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) will, however, have to compete with the hon. Gentleman who should have moved the Second Reading of the Weights and Measures Bill. Perhaps he has drifted off because, like the Prime Minister, he did not know that a "large white" meant a loaf of bread. Surely that is why the Weights and Measures Bill should be considered—to ensure that a "large white" is a proper loaf of bread, not chalk, for instance.

12.15 pm

Mr. Skinner: I do not know about the Prime Minister and the large white, but I know that when she used to serve in Alderman Roberts's shop in Grantham she was so keen on making a profit that she used to cut up the dolly mixtures to make sure that they were not over weight. Once someone gets down to that sort of thing we know that they are into making money. [HON. MEMBERS: She has been cutting ever since."] She certainly had a lot of practice then. People would come in for 2 oz of dolly mixtures and she would put them on the scales and if they were a bit over weight she would cut them in half.

When I went to Grantham I said to an old fellow there, "Do you remember her?" He said, "Oh aye, we all knew about Snobby Roberts." Of course, we are all fashioned in our childhood; we are all products of our environment. If someone has spent her time behind a shop counter slicing the bacon so thin that people can see through it and cutting dolly mixtures in half, is it any wonder that when she becomes Prime Minister she is prepared to cut services? Is it any wonder that the NHS is under attack?

Mind you, she is not cutting the money at Downing Street. It is costing more than £5 million a year to keep it going—more than for Buckingham Palace. That is why the Queen gets so upset. But I shall leave that subject altogether, Mr. Deputy Speaker; I am more concerned about the constitutional propriety of changing "repeal" to "amend".

Mr. Ray Powell: My hon. Friend mentioned that the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) might be looking for promotion to the Whips' Office, and might be walking in with his billiard cue. He also mentioned the amount of time that the hon. Gentleman had spent on the Bill.

Earlier this week we heard about the amount of time that had been spent on other Bills—hours and hours. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), for instance, had spent 162 hours considering the Electricity Bill. How much time was spent on this Bill? Was it two minutes, one minute, three and a half minutes? That is how much time the hon. Member for Basingstoke, who is expecting a promotion to either the House of Lords or the Whips' Office, has spent on it.

Mr. Skinner: That is the kernel of the argument. My hon. Friends and I expected a proper explanation after Mr. Speaker had told us what had happened. We raised points of order because we could not believe what we were hearing—that two "verbal" amendments were to be discussed on Third Reading.

That is so unusual that I was wondering whether the Mace would have to be removed. I was not sure of the exact procedure, and wondered whether the Serjeant at Arms—or perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown)—would have to come and take the Mace away. [HON. MEMBERS: "Or Heseltine."] The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) would really be more appropriate, because he waved the Mace around his head. I thought that that might happen, because it happens when a Bill goes into Committee. It was an interesting little parliamentary scene for the connoisseur. I thought that because the Mace had not been taken away we were not in Committee and then I thought, "What cheek. The Government are amending a Bill that has never been debated in the House of Commons."

The hon. Member for Basingstoke who has promoted the Bill on behalf of the Government—we all know that that is what this is all about—was expected to explain, amid all the confusion, why suddenly a Bill to repeal the Clean Air Act is now a Bill to amend it. That can mean that it might improve it, whereas in the context of the ports Bill "repeal" means to destruct and to destroy. It was only to be expected that a full and proper explanation would be given, especially since there has not been discussion on this before. Well, we did not get much of an explanation——

Mrs. Dunwoody: We did not get any.

Mr. Skinner: No, we did not get any explanation and the Minister then made a brief appearance at the Dispatch Box. However, as she wants to safeguard her future, she

was not prepared to put her foot in it. If somebody is to start making charges, the Minister does not want it on her doorstep. It would be better in Ridley's backyard rather than in hers—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about planning permission?"] That is the position that we are in and it is a tidy old mess.

Mr. Ray Powell: My hon. Friend mentioned the Minister and perhaps he will recall that I was in full flight in my comments on the amendments but because I thought that the Minister would make a statement to solve our problems, I stopped—*[Interruption.]* Obviously, the Minister would not have been able to do that in a point of order or an intervention. I stopped halfway through my speech. I still have my speech with me and there is at least one hour's contribution left. Although I gave way to the Minister, she did not resolve the problem or get us out of this dilemma and that is typical of the way in which the Government act towards Opposition Members——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mr. Powell: However, what is coming out now is something even worse because we know that some of our hon. Friends have prepared for the next debate but have now found that that Bill is to be withdrawn because yet again the Government have decided—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief. I call Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Skinner: When my hon. Friend said that he would draw his remarks to a close, I was listening because I thought that as my hon. Friend is a gentleman he would give way——

Mr. Powell: My father was a miner.

Mr. Skinner: I was waiting to hear what the Minister would say in explanation and in answer to the many points that have been put forward. I knew that my hon. Friend had not dealt with everything because I remembered my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) asking him whether he had read the document on pollution control. It was a fairly weighty tomb—no, tome. *[Laughter.]* Well, perhaps it should have been a tomb as well—a tomb to put the Government in.

I wondered why my hon. Friend was not speaking at length, or at least to some extent, about the document. I thought that my hon. Friend was anxious to hear the Minister explain the predicament caused by the Government which has landed on the shoulders of the hon. Member for Basingstoke. He is carrying the can. We have been able to remove part of that weight from his shoulders. It is true that he is acting in good old party fashion, but why should he carry all the blame? I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore had cut short his speech so that the Minister could rise to explain what had happened. However, she played it craftily—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, aye."] She said I want to reserve my comments for the Third Reading debate. She was cleverly trying to escape from explaining why the Government were pushing through a Bill via a Back Bencher, which is totally opposite to the Bill that went through the initial proceedings. I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore bring his remarks to a close, but he did not get the answer that he expected.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Was it not worse than my hon. Friend has made out? The Minister said something revealing when she said, "If we are allowed to proceed without any further discussion to the Third Reading, I will make my remarks." What is happening with this Bill is what has happened with so many other Bills. Bills that look as if they are private Members' Bills are introduced, the Government having decided that they want them to go ahead. If we had not debated the amendments—as we are doing—then, and only then, would we have heard the Government's attitude.

Mr. Skinner: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Anderson: And worse, had we fallen for the stratagem of the Government and allowed the amendments through at this stage, surely the Government would have argued on Third Reading that there was a fait accompli and said, "After all, you agreed it." Is that not indicative of the serpentine way in which the Government are trying to move?

In passing, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and my Welsh hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) on playing the House of Commons role in this matter——

Mrs. Dunwoody: He is not the only hon. Member from Wales.

Mr. Skinner: I liked my hon. Friend's description, "the serpentine way". Perhaps he was trying to say that the Government are lower than a snake's belly. At least, I thought that that was roughly what he was trying to say, but I know that he is a lawyer and that they do things differently.

Before we go any further I want to put on record the fact that this is no longer a private member's day. That has been established beyond peradventure this morning——

Mr. Anderson: Lawyers would say, "Beyond reasonable doubt."

Mr. Skinner: We thought that we were here to deal with private Members' business, but we have found out that this is really a Government Bill which has been shovelled towards a Back Bencher. Indeed, it was drawn up wrongly in the process. We also know that another private Member's Bill has been taken off the Order Paper—that is, if the Library authorities are correct.

I do not want anybody, especially the press, to suggest for one moment that there has been an attempt to scupper a prized private Members' day. What we have been doing this morning, and especially my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, is stopping the Government in their tracks. Nobody should have any doubt any longer that this Friday is about private Members' business.

This has been one of the most obnoxious pieces of chicanery and conspiracy from the Government since they have been in power. Not content with having Monday to Thursday for getting through their own business, the Government have decided to use Friday as well. Let nobody say any different because we are not discussing Bills that were drawn out in the top six in the private Members' ballot. We are discussing Bills that have been slipped through with Government connivance. We should have no fears or worries about spoiling a private Member's

[Mr. Skinner]

day because this week the Government have collared Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and now Friday for their own business.

The Prime Minister decides to go green. She wants a little green Bill to go through and she leaves it in the hands of the Secretary of State for the Environment. He produces a Bill that is upside down, so he passes it to a Tory Back Bencher. Then the Government do not have the guts to explain why confusion reigns.

Mr. Ray Powell: I owe my hon. Friend an apology. Earlier he suggested that this could have been arranged by the Whips' office. I have been a Whip. I was brought up in chapel, so I said that I did not suspect that the Whips on either side, or the usual channels, could be involved. That is why I made that comment, but I withdraw it and apologise, because my hon. Friend has proved beyond doubt that the Government and the Government Whips must have been involved in the process.

12.30 pm

Mr. Skinner: The truth is that the Government Whips operate differently. My hon. Friend is a member of what I would call a loose federation in the Labour Whips' Office. When one is in the Government Whips' Office, however, one is a Minister and part of the collective responsibility, unless one is the Secretary of State for Wales. Then one does one's own thing. If one is a Government Whip, one has to toe the line. What happens is that one of those Whips comes along and says, "Pass the Bill down the line." There is always a pair of waiting hands in the gully or at third slip.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend makes a serious point about the Government taking all the business of the House to themselves and not giving any of it to Back Benchers. To refer to my hon. Friend's earlier analogy, would he describe the Prime Minister as having given up cutting the dolly mixtures? She now wants all the dolly mixtures in the parliamentary timetable for herself. To elaborate on that analogy, does my hon. Friend agree that it does not extend to the liquorice? Instead of cutting everything, she has given a lot to the wealthy. It does not apply to the all-sorts. The wealthy have got more from this Government.

Mr. Skinner: I just cannot see the Prime Minister in the role of "Hello, Dolly." She does not conjure up that image for me. I have said before that she does not conjure up for me, either, the image of being one of the greens—in an anorak and wellies and carrying a bowl of rice.

It is just as well that we sussed this out. It has been good for Parliament. We do not change a great deal here. Dramatic changes take place outside Parliament. Most Opposition Members believe that, but we have to use Parliament as a sounding board and for passing legislation when dramatic changes are effective. Since we are here, however, we have got to do a job.

This morning—albeit it is a small beginning—we have been able to explain quite vividly that Parliament is being hijacked. What is worse, the private Member's Bill day is being hijacked. People talk about filibustering. That never occurs here. We hear about hon. Members debating a private Member's Bill and preventing other hon. Members from getting their Bills through. That is not what has happened today. The Government had plans to get their own little Bill through, even though it came from a Department that got four other Government Bills wrong.

In the last few years the Department of the Environment has introduced Bills that had to be drastically changed. On at least two or three occasions it had to go to the law courts to get them changed as a result of action taken outside this place. On other occasions, the same Department had to introduce retrospective legislation to put right previous legislation. This is another example. On this occasion it said, "There won't be many there on Friday. We will slip it through on Back Benchers' day." That is what the game is all about.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend recall that in her brief remarks the Minister claimed that local authorities had been consulted about the Bill? She said that there had been wide consultation. She claimed that hon. Members would have been involved in consultations with the local authorities in their constituencies. Is it not outrageous that, after the huge panoply of consultation that the Minister claimed had taken place, the Government should have produced a shoddy Bill such as this instead of adopting the proper procedure—a public Bill in Government time?

Mr. Skinner: We always hear about consultation. I find it rather strange that next Thursday we are to discuss procedure on some other Bills. Why are we to do that? Because over the years people have discovered that there is an inherent weakness in the way in which those Bills are proceeded with in the House in that the Government have gradually invaded what used to be private Bills. Those private Bills, which were generally of a very minor nature, have suddenly become much more political, and it has become so bad that next Thursday we are to debate changing the procedure for private Bills because the Government have allowed and have even encouraged the private Bill procedure to have a more overt political tone.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does my hon. Friend agree that, certainly in transport Bills, the Government are using the private Bill procedure as an alternative means of getting planning permission? They are pushing through the House major Bills which are taking the place of normal planning procedure. They are getting them on the statute book to bring about what they could not achieve by using the agreed procedures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will resist the temptation to expand on that point. Let us stick to Friday, this Bill and these amendments.

Mr. Skinner: I must answer that because, although you have to guide us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few of us were here this morning and we witnessed a parliamentary scene of confusion that we have not witnessed in all the years that we have been here and Mr. Speaker used words——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me disabuse the hon. Gentleman. I assure him that I have been here in spirit since 9.30 this morning, I have heard almost every word that has been said, and the Chair is indivisible in these matters.

Mr. Skinner: What was initially a motley crew has now developed into concerted, collective action. On private Members' days we do not have Whips and we do not

accept one person's point of view on any particular issue. From the explanations given by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore and others, it is pretty clear that there has been a conspiracy by the Government, on the Bill.

You have to sit in the Chair on many Fridays, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You also sit there from Mondays to Thursdays, and you expect a different argument on Fridays. But today it is the same argument. It is a Government Bill which has been produced by the Government and parcelled off to a Tory Back Bencher who has to take the flak. We are discussing specifically whether the amendments to replace "repeal" with "amend" are acceptable, and to reach a conclusion on that we have to find out why the word "repeal" was used in the first place. We have to find out where the murky trail began. We have discovered that it did not begin at Basingstoke. We found that it began in Downing street, in the Cabinet, and in the Department of the Environment. That is where the trail led us, and once we had discovered that we had every right to consider the amendments against the background of Government interference in a private Member's day.

We have no alternative. We are now engaged in a battle against the Government and that is not normal practice on a Friday. Although I find it hard to take my Opposition hat off on any day, most of us try to consider Fridays in a different light. That is what we are doing here today and Opposition Members are fully apprised.

Ms. Quin: Is it not the case that by introducing amendments at this late stage the Government are avoiding the consultation that they should be having with the many interested parties? Is it not also the case that, by introducing a Bill in this way, they are avoiding consultations which would be of great value to both sides of the House?

Mr. Skinner: A properly drawn up Bill dealing with the environment including these measures, would be supported. Such a Bill should be drawn up after proper consultation with local authorities—not the type of consultation that the dockers have had—and with hon. Members. In this age, more and more people are concerned about the environment and everyone knows that we cannot patch the hole in the ozone layer by using some sort of Tebbit-like entrepreneur. We cannot clean up the environment by allowing market forces to proliferate. Imagine saying to somebody, "We've a hole in the ozone layer and we are leaving it to an entrepreneur on an enterprise allowance to patch it up." It is nonsense.

We all know that if the environment is to be cleaned up, it has to be done by collective action. Once we start talking about collective action, we are talking about society, and that is a word that the Prime Minister does not like. Only people who are prepared to back philosophically collective action can sort out the problems surrounding the amendments. It cannot be done by the operation of market forces. I can see the twinkle in the eyes of many of my hon. Friends now that we have moved into this territory.

Mr. Ray Powell: We should be considering what the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) will say about all the comments that have been made on this issue. What part has he played in the conspiracy? When he walked down Whitehall to obtain his instructions, was he told, "You will be all right because we will not reach the second or third Bill on the Order Paper"? If that is the case, all the preparation for the debates on the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill and the Sunday Trading (Reform) Bill will be wasted. By the time the hon. Member for Basingstoke gives the House his explanation there will be no time left.

All that is engendered by a Government conspiracy against us and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, it is taking place on a private Member's day. It will affect Bills other than those on the Order Paper today. Some hon. Members have sat up all night preparing for the introduction of a Bill under the ten minute rule. They have now found out that if the Government want something, they conspire to ensure that an hon. Member will obtain it for them, but when they do not want something they are prepared to stop private Members' Bills. That is what we should be looking at.

Mr. Skinner: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is worth saying that later today the Elimination of Poverty in Retirement Bill will be moved. I offer a challenge now to the Government: when the Bill is moved at 2.30 pm, do not object to it. If they believe in looking after old-age pensioners by giving them proper aid and assistance, they should not object to the Bill. If they can destroy a private Member's day by bringing forward their own considerations, they should not stop Bills of that nature. Hon. Members have queued up to obtain an opportunity to introduce a Bill under the ten-minute rule.

Why were verbal amendments moved? Why did the amendments arrive only this morning? As the Bill passed its previous stages several Fridays ago—you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may have been in the Chair when that happened —why was it not revealed that the Bill had been given the wrong title? Three or four weeks is a long time for legislation. The Government could have said, "Do you know what we have done? We have given the Bill the wrong title. Instead of giving it a title to amend the Clean Air Act, we have given it a title to repeal it."

12.45 pm

Three or four weeks have elapsed, yet nothing has happened, which means that the mistake was not spotted by civil servants. Let us assume that civil servants knew and that, rather like "Yes, Minister", Sir Humphrey or his equivalent said, "Hallo, hallo, hallo, look at this lot. The Bill will repeal the Clean Air Act instead of amending it. I said that it should be amended before I told you to find an hon. Member who would introduce it." Let us assume that Sir Humphrey or his counterpart said to the Secretary of State for the Environment, "Here is a good Bill. It has a green image and will be like a glow-worm in Downing Street. It will show that the Prime Minister means business."

I think that I know what went wrong in those four weeks. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) hinted at the answer at 9.40 am. I think that the Government were aware of the mistake but hoped that it would escape attention, as it did on the first occasion. They thought, "We have made a mess of this and we will probably place the Chair in a predicament", which was the case when Mr. Speaker had to make a statement about the new 18-year development. They thought that they would slide the Bill through and get on to the next one.

Mr. Anderson: Is it possible that Sir Humphrey knew the effect of the error from the outset but that the Government, as with other matters, refused to listen?

Mr. Skinner: Normally, we see civil servants shuffling papers back and forth to the Minister. I have been here all morning, but I have not seen any paper going back and forth. Labour Members have asked many questions and my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich raised several constitutional matters. One would have thought that if what we were saying was untrue a little bit of paper would have come from the Box.

Mr. Anderson: Confetti.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, confetti. There has been no paper from the Box.

Labour Members sussed out the Government early on. I am not prepared to accept lectures from the Government about private Members' Bill time. They have hijacked a private Members' day to pass a Bill that was wrongly drafted.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Does not the hon. Gentleman think that the answer may be that my hon. Friend the Minister is so competent that she does not need to be briefed and has all the answers waiting for the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Lady has not been here all morning. I suppose that she was down at Wimbledon, getting ready for the ticket touts in June and July. Had she been here she would have heard the minister speak briefly, because she has been handed the difficult job of trying to explain away why it is that the amendment seeks to make the Bill wholly different from what it was before. The minister dodged the issue. If the hon. Lady had been here, she would have thought that it was funny that the Minister should get up to explain yet explain nothing although she would have kept her mouth shut because she would have thought, "She is one of ours". She would also have thought, "There must be some reason for the Minister's reticence." I did not hear the Minister explain or give any answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore. The Minister wanted to intervene, but did not give the answers. If the hon. Lady had been here, she would have known the answer. As she asked, I have given her the answer.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Bill was obviously drafted by the Department, which would have used parliamentary draftsmen. They are specific in their instructions to Ministers that the English used must reflect accurately legal interpretations. Is it not a shame that they handed over to the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) a document that is so deficient in its drafting? The draftsmen not only missed their own incompetence, but had to bring in a rarely used procedural measure to do something about it. They should apologise to the hon. Member for Basingstoke, who has been put in an awkward position.

Mr. Skinner: Although the Minister made only a brief statement, she could at least have done what my hon. Friend has suggested. She could have said to her hon. Friend the member for Basingstoke, "I am not going to say much about the amendments because they are a bit of an embarrassment to me. We have placed you in something of a predicament." The hon. Gentleman has had to sit here all morning. I imagine that they told him beforehand that the Bill would be through quickly and he may have expected it to be all over by 10 am or 10.30 am. That may have been the signal he was given. The Minister should say, "We are sorry that the Bill was wrongly drafted. I apologise for all the trouble and embarrassment caused." Even at this stage the Minister could intervene and apologise for the trouble that she has caused him. We do not need apologies. In many ways, we have scored a parliamentary triumph today in thwarting the Government's activities. *[Laughter.* Some Tory Members laugh. Had they been here earlier and listened to the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook), who spoke briefly on the matter, they would have known that what I am saying is said against the background of a Conservative Member fully understanding the muddle that the Government have created. I do not want to put words into his mouth, but he more or less said that in typical, Tory coded language.

Mr. Cryer: The Walker code.

Mr. Skinner: It was a bit more overt than that. The hon. Gentleman was astounded that such a procedure was being developed. He wanted to know how, when and why. He did not go on at length, but he made his point and he did not receive any answers. We have not had any answers either. The hon. Member for Orpington might explain to his hon. Friends who were not here at the beginning how the new procedure was brought in. We have sussed out the truth. We are trying not only to deal with the Bill and the amendments, but to ensure that such a mistake does not happen again. I hope that the Bill will go through. We have tried to ensure that such a mistake does not happen before with the Department of the Environment. Other Bills have been taken up in court and have caused the introduction of retrospective legislation. We have said, "Don't do it again." Then the Secretary of State has done it again. They have got the legislation wrong five times, and this makes it six.

Why should we just say, "We are sorry that you have got it wrong. You have brought in a bill that is totally wrecked compared with what it was at the beginning"? We must put it on the record that we shall not allow Parliament to be abused in this way or for private Member's day to be taken over by the Government to get their Bills through rather than use the opportunity on proper Government days to introduce proper environmental measures.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend has suggested that the decent thing for the Minister to do would be to apologise for the abuse which the Government, through this shabby little conspiracy, have heaped upon the House. Does my hon. Friend agree that expecting an apology from the Government to a democratic institution is like asking for snow not to melt in spring? The Government's hallmark is what Lord Hailsham described as the elective dictatorship. When the Labour Government were in a minority and, ever since, with a majority of 100 on the Conservative side, the Conservatives have tried to trample on the rights of the House. They have used that majority and Lord Hailsham has never uttered a single criticism of the true elective dictatorship with which we are faced.

Mr. Skinner: It is not just that. We do not expect Lord Hailsham to defend the rights of working class people. It has been left to Labour Members to sort out this constitutional and parliamentary chaos. It is significant that throughout the debate—it is now nearly 1 o'clock

—not a single member of the rag tag and bobtail parties has been present. Those Social and Liberal Democrats go round the country talking about Parliament. We hear the leader of the officials and the leader of the provos on television. They talk about the need to reform Parliament. Where are they today? We have seen neither hide nor hair of them. They are not concerned about the way in which parliamentary procedures are trampled upon. They have not turned up for work. It has been left to Labour Members to discover the way in which the Government have taken over this Friday for their purposes.

Those Members who should be here have gone missing. I suppose that they are down in the Vale of Glamorgan —some good that will do them! I have been told that they have a meeting with Michael Meadowcroft because he has started another party. They are spawning—it is like mushrooms in a field. Every time I pick up a newspaper, there is another party, so we cannot expect those people to be here advising on the parliamentary chaos when they have so much chaos within their ranks.

Mr. Cryer: They are experts.

Mr. Skinner: There is no doubt about that. In the last election they were going to appeal to the electorate by saying, "Leave it to us. We will work with anyone." They are not working today, are they? They are not here. I knew that for a lie at the beginning. During the 1987 election, I saw one of the leaders get on one bus and another get on another bus. I said to a mate, "Did you notice that? They are supposed to be together but they are on different buses!"

We do not want those people to tell us about how to make sure that Back Benchers' rights are protected against a Government who are prepared to trample all over those rights and to bring in a Bill using all sorts of methods so that it can weave its way through Parliament. It is nearly 1 o'clock.

Mr. Cohen: I have followed the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) about the way in which the amendments and the Bill have come about. I agree that they may have emanated from Downing street. An even more sinister possibility which my hon. Friend should consider is that the Bill started out repealing the exemption from the statutory nuisance provisions. If the amendment is passed, people will be able to create a smoke nuisance.

1 pm

The sinister aspect is that, perhaps the Government meant "amend" in the first place but put "repeal" because they wanted to defuse any opposition so that the issue would not be raised. Now, at this late stage, the Government have come up with this new procedure—verbal amendments—to stick in the word "repeal". They avoided doing so earlier when there could have been criticism and a proper debate on the matter. Will my hon. Friend consider that sinister possibility?

Mr. Skinner: That is a more sinister argument. What my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton says is interesting and quite possible. We should examine what he is saying, which is that when the Government first introduced the Bill they deliberately put in "repeal" to put people off, so that they would say, "This is not a matter for us." Then on Third Reading, they changed it. That is really sinister.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton has been right on such matters before. If this sort of procedure is to take place we should try it regularly on every Bill put before the House. We are to start discussing the Dock Work Bill on Monday and we have already discussed the possibility of changing its title so that instead of repealing the docks scheme we will amend it.

Imagine the sort of measures that could be carried through when we are in Government—my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton might be a junior Minister like the hon. Member for Surrey, South West (Mrs. Bottomley), or even in the Cabinet, and he could quietly say to me and one or two others, "Don't worry about the Bill on Friday —we don't mean to do what it says because we are going to change its title; we only put it in to keep the Tories off." It would be an interesting development to bring in Bills which were the opposite of what they were intended to be. Talk about a circus—the Government have done some tricks in here from time to time but if this is what they are up to now, we shall need the sharp eyes of my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton on all these Bills. I shall certainly go through them all from now on. Most of the Bills that are being fetched off the shelf and handed down to Tory Back Benchers for a bit of kudos could mean the opposite of what they say, so we shall have to come here every Friday from now on.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I want to vote for some of them.

Mr. Skinner: We shall have to have two briefs. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) says that she will come to vote. It will mean a bit more work, but we shall have to prepare a brief in favour of the Bill and one against it in case it is amended at the last minute. We have no alternative.

Mr. Anderson: During the past two decades the Government have been bound to set out the way in which Bills affect finances and manpower, and the European Community. Will it be possible for the Government to add a third consideration—whether the Bill should be taken seriously at its face value?

Mr. Skinner: Imagine what the papers would say if the Labour party was doing this—what would have happened if a Labour Government had shovelled this Bill to a Back Bencher? The headlines in the Tory press the next day would have read, "Labour in complete bungle." We have not seen many members of the press in the Gallery today. The press would have said, "Total incompetence". The newspapers would have used all the epithets that they could think of, but I bet that they will not do that on this occasion. We shall have an opportunity in future to examine the matter, but we had better be careful about all the provisions in this Bill.

I have spoken for a long time because we are dealing with a constitutional matter. We thought that today's debate would be about a minor smoke pollution control Bill, but it has not been about that at all. When I discussed the Bill earlier with my hon. Friends, we thought that it would finish fairly early—we did not know that the Government were up to some dirty work, but we have found them out. Having found them out, we explored all the possible reasons as to why they had hijacked this private Members' day and brought it under their own control.

[Mr. Skinner]

In the past three hours or so we have made a protest, not just because of the Bill but because we have to stop the evil practice of turning the titles of Bills upside down in the course of their preparation. We have to stop the nonsense of Bills going through on the nod without proper debate. Today's happenings will make us wary about that in future.

For all those reasons, I am happy in the knowledge that my hon. Friends now understand the matter more clearly. As we approach the end of today's business, we are more aware and better understand the way in which the procedures of the House have been bludgeoned by the Government. That has to stop. For that reason, on every Friday in future while the Government remain in office we shall closely scrutinise all Bills to find out whether they mean the opposite of what they are supposed to mean and to make sure that this is the last time the Government can hijack a private Members' day for their own purposes. That is what we have learnt this morning.

Mr. Anderson: I should like to develop the theme of elective dictatorships. It has emerged forcefully during the debate that a tribute must be paid to my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on carrying out a magnificent House of Commons job.

When we take parties of schoolchildren or others through the Members' Lobby, we show them the statues of Lloyd George, Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee. There is also an empty plinth. In future, it may have on it a statue of either my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover or my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore, because today's debate has shown them to be great House of Commons men. We congratulate them on their forensic skills. What appeared to be a sprat of a Bill was proved by them to be something far more significant. My two hon. Friends have followed the clues in a fine forensic way from Basingstoke to the very steps of Downing street, and that in itself is a tribute to their skills. They have shown the way in which the Government are able to manipulate private Members' time.

I generally feel sympathy for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and for your colleagues in the Chair when you are subjected to difficulties posed by the Government. The Minister is greatly respected by all hon. Members, and because of that she has been landed with the baby—if that is not a sexist term. She has been forced to take the flak in quite an undeserved way. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), to whom we all pay tribute, in all innocence accepted the Bill. From a legal viewpoint, I would like to know the terms of the contract that the hon. Gentleman concluded with the Government. What were the promises and undertakings made by the Government about the time that the hon. Gentleman would be engaged in the House on the Bill? He was probably told, "Look, here is a little Bill off the shelf. We promise that it will last only a couple of minutes and you can be back in your constituency opening a fete"—or whatever one does on a Friday. "We give you our solemn promise as a Government that it will not take long." However, because of a mistake made by the Government, it is just after 1 o'clock and the poor hon. Member for Basingstoke is still here.

The Minister began by saying it was an error. She refused to say whose error it was, because—if she had been smoked out—if she had been frank and had said that it was an error, either of the parliamentary draftsmen or of the legal advisers in the Department of the Environment, she would have let the cat out of the bag. We would have known straight away —as we all know in reality—that it is a Government Bill that masquerades as a private Member's Bill on a Private Member's day.

That happens all too frequently. When I entered the House in 1966 Private Member's Bills were just that. So long as the first eight Members put forward a reasonable and not eccentric Bills, they would expect to get their Bills through, and other Bills, too—given a fair wind—had a chance. Now, effectively, the Government have taken over Private Member's Bills procedure and even the first six in the ballot have no chance of making any serious progress with their Bills, unless they have the full authority and the concurrence of the Government.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Is my hon. Friend not understating his case? We have seen on a number of occasions Bills of hon. Members in the first six in the ballot not succeeding if the Government have not liked them. An example was the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), to assist the handicapped. Even when a Bill is high up in the chain, it often suffers from the payroll vote of Members who are present on a Friday and can defeat crucial and major parts of it. Nowadays, unless a Private Member has a Bill in which the Government acquiesce, all sorts of devices are used to block it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I realise that the hon. Gentleman is still on his preamble and is making some general remarks, but I am sure that he will now anchor his remarks to this Bill.

Mr. Anderson: I shall be brief because I know that other hon. Members want to speak before we proceed to Third Reading. I am joining my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) in exposing what has increasingly been Government practice—that is, to obliterate what used to be the intermediary bodies between Government and citizens. They have done it across the board. They have done that with the trade unions, with local government and with all bodies that used to filter and alter the views of Government. We have in Parliament an exact example of what Government have done. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said, it is a form of elective dictatorship.

When Lord Hailsham used the phrase "elective dictatorship" against the Labour Government, I confess that I had a certain sympathy with him. I would now consider his views with greater esteem and consider them to be more credible if we had had even a peep from Lord Hailsham about what is happening under this Government. It is clear that, when he criticised an elective dictatorship, he was doing it in a one-eyed, selective and partisan way.

Mr. Bermingham: My hon. Friend may not be aware that Lord Hailsham said this morning that the present Government were sitting on their head and thinking with their bottom.

Mr. Anderson: That was only because it concerned an area in which Lord Hailsham has a special interest—that

of the law. When he sees the other major inroads into private liberties—the other major demands made by this authoritarian Government—and says nothing, we can hold certain views on Lord Hailsham.

I leave elective dictatorship there. I commend my hon. Friends for the tremendous work that they have done on behalf of the House. I look forward to developing my points on Third Reading.

1.15 pm

Mr. Win Griffiths: When I entered the House this morning, I expected a completely different sort of day from that which I have so far experienced. Earlier this week, I was advised that the Control of Smoke Pollution Bill was uncontroversial and would go through with little debate, but that the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill would excite some discussion—and I prepared myself for that possibility. Having listened to what will probably go down as some of the most eminent contributions in defence of Back Benchers' and private Members' rights, I discover that the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill will not be debated. Instead, I find myself in the midst of a constitutional and procedural crisis. Moreover, it is a crisis of which the generality of right hon. Members are unaware.

Arriving at the House this morning, I detected a whispering hum in the Tea Room about the verbal amendments to the Control of Smoke Pollution Bill that were to be debated this morning—the like of which had not been seen for 18 years. Only right hon. and hon. Members who happened to be present in the House this morning were aware of those amendments.

I still hope that the Minister or the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) will tell the House who drafted the Bill. At one point, my sympathies lay with the hon. Member for Basingstoke for having been handed such a measure by his Government. However, his continued silence throughout the debate makes me wonder whether he expects some kind of preferment afterwards for being so stoical in accepting without comment all the remarks that have been made.

The explanatory and financial memorandum makes the Bill's intentions fairly clear. However, the repeal of the long title is quite against the legislation's intentions as described in the explanatory and financial memorandum. I hope that an acceptable agreement will be reached that will allow the small but worthy improvement to the environment that the Bill would provide—at least as reflected in the explanatory and financial memorandum—to be made as if the Bill had been allowed to progress with its original title.

I look forward to a proper explanation of how major errors came to be made. Will the civil servants concerned be exonerated? Will the hon. Member for Basingstoke take it upon himself to accept the blame, or will that be done by the Minister? Or will the blame be accepted by the Secretary of State for the Environment who has not been prepared to come to the House today and face the flak?

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that, in an invisible state, you have been involved in the debate since 9.30 am, and will appreciate that our debate has been about the two amendments. The dilemma facing hon. Members has resolved on those two amendments, but we should now like to bring the debate to a conclusion. With your assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that we shall be able to do so. Perhaps we will be informed by the Minister of the Government's response to the points made by right hon. and hon. Members.

I hope that this point of order will be helpful. If we are given some kind of assurance—perhaps that the amendments will be withdrawn so that they can be dealt with when they have been properly tabled—we may be able to resolve the matter this afternoon so that we can get on with the next debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I have noticed that the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) is trying to catch my eye. He would, of course, need the leave of the House to speak. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Minister."] I now understand that the Minister may wish to speak, again with the leave of the House, so I shall call her.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *rose*——

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before the Minister speaks, may I make a brief point? Perhaps she can tell us the status of the part in summary on the face of the Bill which refers to the removal

"exemption from the statutory nuisance provision of . . . smoke from certain domestic chimneys".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order; it is a point for debate. It would be helpful for the whole House—I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) for his suggestion—if we were now to hear the Minister.

Mrs. Bottomley: Being mindful of the fact that today is a private Members' day, I have done my best to be rather restrained in my remarks. I thought it proper to debate the amendments, particularly in the unusual circumstances—it is 18 years since anyone tried to move a verbal amendment. That seemed an appropriate use of parliamentary time.

I had hoped to speak at much greater length on Third Reading about my experience of these matters. Much concern has been expressed to the Department—whether in Bolton or Barnsley, in Bristol, Scunthorpe or Sheffield—about the burning of buses and the pollution that it causes, let alone the problems emanating from domestic premises, where non-dark smoke causes offence and nuisance to neighbours who are powerless to obtain redress.

Let us examine the history of the matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) is known by everyone in the House to have been a distinguished member of the Select Committee on the Environment. He has a considerable knowledge of environmental matters and indeed of air pollution: he contributed to the Select Committee's report on air pollution. I am surprised that hon. Members should even suggest that he is not a man of great experience, with clear views on the way in which he wished to use his private Member's slot.

My hon. Friend, graciously and kindly, consulted the Department about whether there were matters of concern to him, with his knowledge of air pollution, which would also be popular and acceptable and would play an appropriate part. I ceased only recently to be a Back-Bench Member—a week ago the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said I had been a Minister for only

[Mrs. Bottomley]

five minutes; it is another 10,000 minutes since he said that—but it is important, if a Bill is to meet with success, for it to fit within the general framework.

I said earlier that it was a considerable source of regret that this error was not spotted. The fact is that clause 1 stands fairly and clearly. The substance of the Bill is perfectly straightforward, but for one reason or another its long title did not contain a small substitution. As I have said, it is a source of regret.

It might help the House if—this measure will meet with great popularity among the constituents of all hon. Members——

Mr. Bermingham *rose*——

Mrs. Bottomley: No, I would rather not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke may feel that in the circumstances the best way forward would be for him to seek to withdraw his amendments so that progress could be made on the Bill and it can be considered in another place.

Mr. Hunter: With the leave of the House, may I say how deeply I regret accepting the advice to table the amendments? I apologise to the Chair and to Opposition Members for any embarrassment that this hassle may have caused. I meant no discourtesy.

It has been an interesting and lengthy debate. I stress that there was no conspiracy. It was a monumental blunder. Obviously, as the Bill bears my name I must accept responsibility for it. The original draft of the Bill was changed long before Second Reading. It transpires that the blunder was committed at that stage and that the title of an original draft Bill was not changed. I did not reaslise that at the time of the Bill's Second Reading on 3 March. It was brought to my attention only at the beginning of this week, shortly before the Select Committee on the Environment went away for two days, which meant that I was not in a position to seek advice about it. Therefore, in a hurry, I agreed yesterday to table the amendments.

I accept the advice given by my hon. Friend the Minister. I believe that these matters can be resolved in the House of Lords and, with that in mind, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

1.26 pm

Mr. Hunter: I beg to move, that the Bill be now read the Third time.

If the past few hours are put to one side, the fact remains that this small Bill is an important contribution in the battle against pollution.

Clause 1 seeks to bring certain smoke emitted from domestic premises within the statutory nuisance provisions of part III of the Public Health Act 1936 or, for Scotland, of the Public Health Act (Scotland) 1897. In clause 1, the category of smoke emissions is that of non-dark smoke from dwellings that are not in smoke control areas. So far, that aspect of smoke control does not exist. It is a loophole in the existing legislation and the Bill seeks to close it.

The Clean Air Acts of 1956 and 1968 essentially declare three points. First, there is the prohibition on dark smoke—the most pollutant smoke—from any building except in special circumstances under the regulations introduced by the Secretary of State. Secondly, within the smoke control areas, there is a prohibition on dark and non-dark or clean smoke from all premises. Yet again, there can be exceptions and some were specified when the original smoke control orders were issued. Others have been specified subsequently by the Secretary of State. The third essential aspect of the clean air legislation is that——

Mr. Harry Greenway: When my hon. Friend refers to non-dark or clean smoke, does he include washed smoke?

Mr. Hunter: I do not have the precise details, but I know that the public wealth Acts refer to the Ringelman scale by which the cleanliness or otherwise of smoke is gauged. I imagine that it includes the category that my hon. Friend has in mind, but I cannot be absolutely sure.

The emission of non-dark smoke can in certain circumstances be deemed to be a statutory nuisance. Clause 1 seeks to extend the categories of smoke emission that can be deemed to be a statutory nuisance to include non-dark smoke from dwellings that are not situated in smoke control areas. The existing statutory provisions do not apply to smoke from dwellings that are situated outside smoke control areas. They are limited to industrial premises. The purpose of the clause is to extend the existing statutory provisions that now apply only to industrial premises to domestic dwellings.

The Bill is the result of a consultation process. Opposition Members unfairly ridiculed that suggestion when it was made earlier. In December 1986, the Department of the Environment, the Scottish Development Department and the Welsh office published their review of air pollution control in Great Britain. They published a follow-up paper in December 1988. It was a lengthy consultation process. Local authorities, local authority associations, trade associations, companies, firms and individuals took part in the process. The recommendation that is embodied in clause 1 was made by the Government and it was supported by 64 representations. Four were against. There was overwhelming support for the recommendation.

Clause 2 has two subsections. Subsection (1) refers to the "occupier of the premises." A loophole in the existing legislation has been exposed. The Clean Air Act 1956 and the Clean Air Act 1968 make the occupier the person who is legally responsible. The Acts specify "the occupier". It may be, however, that people other than the occupier in law start a fire that emits the offending smoke. The object of subsection (1) is to make not just the occupier but any person "who causes or permits the emission" responsible. It is a neat tidying up of that loophole.

Local authorities have faced problems over securing prosecutions. It has been difficult for them to establish when combustion has taken place illegally, particularly at night, and the precise nature of the smoke emitted. Subsection (2) is designed to close that loophole and to make prosecutions easier. During the consultation process there was overwhelming support for the proposal that such a change in the law should be made.

The Bill encompasses little but it would achieve a lot if it were passed. I regret that this morning and during the early part of this afternoon we have had to spend, quite rightly a great deal of time on an important matter. I hope that that will not cloud hon. Members' judgment when

they consider the Bill in its own right. I commend the Bill strongly as I believe it will close loopholes and will be a vital part of our legislation against pollution.

1.35 pm

Mr. Bermingham: I shall be extremely brief in asking the Minister for a number of assurances. First, once more parliamentary draftsmanship has led to great delay. Let us be open and honest and admit that it is not the first time, and probably will not be the last time, that that has happened. The basic problem is that "amend" and "repeal" have different meanings.

Secondly, clause 2(2) should be re-examined as it does not cover the problem that has arisen on a number of occasions on demolition sites. A demolition site is said to be a site where a trade or industry is being carried on. The Minister will be well aware that much demolition is taking place in the north of England to rejuvenate inner cities and other areas. That demolition is often carried out by contractors, not local authorities because the local authorities own the land or the premises to be demolished. I know that there have been a number of serious emissions of dark smoke from demolition sites without prosecution because of certain loopholes.

Will the Minister also consider the problem that occurs when explosives are used to demolish buildings? A dust cloud is still a cloud, and can be a very dark cloud which causes great nuisance to the owners of adjoining land. That problem does not appear to be resolved by subsection (2).

Finally, I wish to draw the Minister's attention to the burning of vehicles, which is what might be called the Barnsley and Bolton problem, which I am aware of from yesteryear. In particular, buses and their tyres are burnt. That is often done outside smoke-control areas on sites or land belonging to people who do not give permission for the burning. Will the Minister consult her officials so that when the Bill is considered in another place—I certainly will not impede its progress—the wording of clause 2 can be altered to deal with that problem? The owner of the land is not a willing party to those practices, particularly to the cutting up and burning of buses which causes great offence in the Peak park areas and parts of Lancashire.

I trust that the Minister will undertake to look at those points which should be considered in another place.

1.38 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway: I shall be brief, although I have had the pleasure of listening to some long and remarkable speeches this morning.

I am very interested in the Bill as I welcome legislation which closes loopholes on pollution, particularly smoke pollution which is perhaps the most noxious in that it induces severe illnesses such as congestion of the lungs, very bad throats and bad colds. I well remember the London smogs of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which were largely caused by smoke. Walking through those smogs, one could not see one's hand before one's face, and as one walked along hoping that one was going in the right direction, bits in the air would hit one in the face. It was a very unpleasant experience. For that reason, smog masks were introduced to protect people's noses, but their eyes could not be protected. In the school where I was teaching at the time a great many children became extremely ill due to that smoke pollution. A great deal of it came from domestic chimneys across London and in many cases there were aggressive fires.

I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and my hon. Friend the Minister what the penalties will be for those who are caught by the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke spent no time—I know that he had other things to say—explaining what will happen to a person convicted of an offence under the Bill. It would not be right for the House to agree to the passage of any measure without knowing what penalties are involved.

Clause 1 seeks the

"Removal of exemption from statutory nuisance of smoke from certain domestic chimneys."

That means that private individuals will be subject to the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Hunter: What happens under the existing law to the owners of industrial premises which emit offending smoke will now happen, theoretically, to the domestic dweller. In the first instance, an abatement notice is served requiring the nuisance to cease. If that is not complied with, the local authority may apply to the magistrates court for a nuisance order and finally—theoretically—the matter may go to the county court.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful for that enlightenment. We need to pay attention to the fact that procedures currently enforced against industry will be enforced against individuals. It is extremely important for the House and particularly for my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and the Minister to say that they would expect any court to deal with an individual householder more leniently than an industrial concern. It is a serious weakness in the Bill that attention is not paid to that important matter. If my hon. Friend the Minister can give the House an assurance as to how she expects the courts to act in relation to individuals, we shall be grateful.

There seems to be no difficulty about the definition of dark smoke and non-dark smoke, although you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know that for centuries the election or non-election of a Pope has been signified by the appearance of white or dark smoke above the sistine chapel. The process for producing dark smoke has not always worked and the wrong colour smoke has sometimes appeared, so there can be difficulties about the definition of dark smoke. That should be borne in mind. The burning of very green wood in any household will produce dark smoke, but it is not dirty smoke. That, too, should be dealt with by the promoter of the Bill and by my hon. Friend the Minister.

1.43 pm

Mr. Ray Powell: I shall be brief because we want to move on to the next debate. But for the two amendments, I could have delivered my speech—which took hours last night to prepare—in a reasonable time. I assume, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that your advice would be to save my speech so that if the Bill comes back from another place I shall not have wasted my copious notes.

It has been an interesting debate and the House, the Government and people who make blunders have been taught a lesson. I must tell the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) that we all make blunders on occasions and take decisions that, with the benefit of hindsight, we realise that we should not have taken. I

[Mr. Ray Powell]

assure the hon. Member for Basingstoke that his efforts have taught hon. Members and the Government a useful lesson. I shall be brief because my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and other hon. Members want to deal with the next important debate, but when the Bill returns from the other place we shall consider it closely.

1.45 pm

Mr. Cryer: I travelled this morning from home in Bradford, having attended a constituency meeting last night, to talk about the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill.

The debate has been important. The fact that the Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill—another privatisation measure that the Government attempted to sneak through the parliamentary procedures without proper scrutiny—has been withdrawn is a minor victory. I am pleased that the two amendments to the Control of Smoke Pollution Bill have been withdrawn.

The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) courteously took all the flak directed at the Government by Opposition Members. That should be recognised in the record, because if anyone is to blame it is the Government. The Government have a vast army of civil servants and expert parliamentary draftsmen. Nevertheless, the error was made.

Opposition Members are pleased that the amendments have been withdrawn. The reason why there will be no Division on the general principle of the Bill is the understanding that the amendments will be restored in another place in a better, clearer and less hasty way. We shall be looking out for that when we consider Lords amendments to the Bill. If amendments are not made in the Lords, the Bill will be confused and untidy because it will have repealed section 16(1) (a) of the Clean Air Act 1956 and there will be nothing to amend. It could be argued that that need not be so, but we must always ensure that when legislation leaves both Houses it is as clear as we can make it. We do not want useful legislation to be subject to protracted and expensive challenge in the courts. I therefore expect amendments to be made to make the Bill read sensibly.

I hope that the promoter—especially following the debate on the drafting error—is satisfied that there is a definition of dark smoke in the Bill. He mentioned the Ringelman scale, and those of us who have fed coal into fiery locomotive furnaces know what that is. I am the only hon. Member who has carried a copy of the Ringelman scale in his pocket. As a fireman, I put coal in the locomotive and checked whether emissions conformed with the Ringelman scale or whether they were on the darker side, which could mean prosecution. A widely used degree of definition is available. It is used by environmental health officers to check whether a prosecutable offence has occurred. I assume that in some way or another—I have not checked—there is a link in either the 1956 Act or the 1968 Act with the Ringelman scale, so that a prosecution can be certain.

I look forward to further scrutiny of the Bill. If there are omissions, the scrutiny should be long so as to encourage diligence by the Government. However, I support the general principles of the Bill.

1.55 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I can only say again that it is a source of regret that the drafting error concerning the word "repeal" rather than "amend" in the long title has meant that we have not had sufficient time properly to scrutinise and to discuss all aspects of the Bill or the important effects on individual concerns and grievances in many constituencies.

The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) referred to Rockwool, in his constituency. I can assure him that we have extended the powers of air pollution control and that the fibre works will be within the province of the inspectorate of pollution.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) speculated, rightly, that the Clean Air Act 1956 gives a clear definition of dark smoke and refers to the Ringelman chart, about which the hon. Gentleman has a particular knowledge. The smoke has to appear to be darker than shade 2.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) can be reassured about vehicle burning. Instances of vehicle burning have caused great difficulty. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) also spoke of vehicle burning as being a great danger. It is not only the sooty particulates and the lead, but chlorofluorocarbons from the blown foam and the dioxins from the plastics that are dangerous. The Bill hopes to address such problems.

It is possible to burn matter on demolition sites as long as one can demonstrate that there is no other reasonable, safe and practical method of disposing of the matter. The burning must be carried out in such a manner as to minimise the emission of dark smoke and must be under the direct and continuous supervision of the occupier of the premises.

Our Clean Air Acts have been a monumental success. The hon. Member for Ogmore referred to his early days in Acton when he had to wear a mask over his mouth and could scarcely move about in the smogs of winter. They are a thing of the past. Visibility in London has increased from one and a half miles to four miles over the past 40 years. Central London enjoys twice as much sunshine in winter now as it did then, and that is a dramatic success.

I regret that time constraints have made it impossible for me talk about the other issues of air pollution such as the steps to promote the use of unleaded petrol, the move to remove CFCs to save the ozone layer, the gas desulphurisation programme and the introduction of Low-Nox burners, which will tackle the problem of acid rain. The Government are busy and are committed to reducing air pollution in a number of ways.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has chosen to tackle two particular aspects of air pollution of local and immediate concern. Quite properly, many hon. Members have raised such matters over the years on behalf of their constituents. I should like wholeheartedly to congratulate my hon. Friend on his success.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my hon. Friend spend half a minute in dealing with the penalties for private individuals?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke outlined the position precisely. The maximum penalty is £2,000, and there is no difference between cases of burning generally and domestic nuisance cases.

My hon. Friend has done a great service to the House in bringing forward the Bill. A great deal of care has gone into its preparation, and I wish it well in its further stages.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Weights and Measures (Amendment) Bill

Order for consideration in Committee read.

1.54 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): With the authority of the Member in charge of the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin), I beg to move, That the Bill be considered in Committee on Friday 28 April.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When a Bill is taken out before half-past 2, does that need the leave of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The first Question that is always put is that on when consideration of the Bill is to proceed. It is for the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, or someone else on his behalf, to name a day. The hon. Member for Wycombe named a day, and that procedure is perfectly in order.

Mr. Stanbrook: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand that. That is the procedure which is followed after half-past 2. Does it apply before half-past 2?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The same procedure applies before half-past 2 to any Order of the Day.

Mr. Stanbrook: Therefore, before half-past 2 it is possible for the motion on the Bill to be moved and for a debate on any stage to proceed. Apparently, it is in your hands, Sir, to put the Question to the House as to when next the Bill will be considered. That is a different matter entirely.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member in charge of the Bill can decide whether he wishes it to proceed. Precisely the same applies to Government Bills. What has happened today on this Bill has been in order.

Mr. Stanbrook: What form of authority from the Member in charge of the Bill is required to enable another Back Bencher to proceed with it? Is there any formality about the passing of that authority?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On these occasions, the Chair is always prepared to accept the good faith of an hon. Member when he says that he is speaking on behalf of another hon. Member. The Chair accepts that automatically.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to move, on behalf of the Prime Minister, that the Bill on Monday to repeal the dock labour scheme be not proceeded with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member had better wait until Monday and see how he gets on then.

Sunday Trading (Reform) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.57 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The problem with the position in which I find myself is that one prepares for a speech of not more than three and a half hours and not less than four minutes and, invariably, the latter transpires. Because of this morning's efforts—no doubt well meant—we have about 35 minutes to talk about this important subject. I shall endeavour to truncate my observations and allow other hon. Members to participate. I hope that those hon. Members who follow me will, in the same spirit, allow as many colleagues as possible to speak.

I am sure that I need not remind the House that the present Sunday trading law is essentially that regulated by the Shops Act 1950 and a number of subsequent small amendments. The Shops Act is riddled with anomalies and does not reflect in any sense modern social patterns. Schedules 5 and 6 show that that is nonsense. Schedule 5 provides:

"Transactions for the purposes of which a shop may be open in England and Wales for the serving of customers on Sunday".

That includes

"meals or refreshments whether or not for consumption at the shop at which they are sold, but not including the sale of fried fish and chips at a fried fish and chip shop".

One can have one's fish and chips, but not from a fish and chip shop, as anyone born north of the Trent knows, is the only place at which one should ever eat fish and chips. As was the spirit in those days, one can buy "intoxicating liquours" and "tobacco and smokers' requisites". One can buy "flowers, fruit and vegetables". In particular, according to schedule 5, one may include mushrooms in that purchase. That is an important addition, which has vexed many a council for many a day. One may buy

"milk and cream, not including tinned or dried milk or cream, but including clotted cream whether sold in tins or otherwise;"

I shall pass over what clotted cream in tins is like, but, if it can be found, one may buy it.

In the spirit of schedule 5, and in order to allay the fears of those ecologically-minded hon. Members who care about such matters, if they want to travel here by horse on a Sunday they may buy

"fodder for horses, mules, ponies and donkeys"—

if they happen to come by donkey—

"at any farm, stables, hotel or inn."

If people want to buy fodder for a donkey, they should do so not from a roadside trader because that would be illegal, but from an inn, which would be legal.

If I had time to make a three-and-a-half-hour speech, it would be mildly amusing to go through the list in greater detail. However, I shall summarise it by saying that the present law allows one to buy fresh but not dried milk, newspapers but not toilet paper, car batteries but not torch batteries, and fan belts but not ladies' tights. Everyone knows that if a fan belt breaks, by far the best way of restarting the car is to buy a pair of ladies' tights and use them as a fan belt.

My hon. Friend the Member for ——

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Billericay.

Mr. Norris: I am glad to see that my hon. Friend has been there long enough to remember the name of her constituency. She has probably used the odd pair of tights in that way and should know that she can buy a fan belt on a Sunday but not a pair of tights.

I am sure that this will not affect my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), but she can buy gin but not a baby's bottle, Easter eggs but not fresh eggs. She can buy car oil but not cooking oil. The present legislation is a complete and absolute nonsense. I need go no further with schedules 5 and 6 or the Shops Act 1950. It is an extraordinarily patronising piece of legislation which Conservative Members should be prepared to see the back of once and for all.

In addition, patterns of life have changed considerably over the past 40 years. I shall pass over the question of the standards of religious observance. Clearly, there are higher living standards, which have created a higher demand for leisure activities, particularly gardening, and repairing and improving homes. The DIY boom is important in connection with the Bill. Much DIY activity involves going to stores to purchase the goods, which involves breaking the law.

There has also been a change in women's approach to work. In 1951, only 26 per cent. of married women were in employment. Now the figure is 61 per cent.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington) *rose*——

Mr. Norris: In order to give as many hon. Members as possible the opportunity to speak, I shall not take interventions.

The enforcement of the present law is not merely nonsense. The list on its own can be funny, and seen as one of those amusing hilarities such as the existence of the death penalty for witchcraft. However, enforcement of such law is outrageous. There are about 420 enforcing authorities in England and Wales, and it is estimated that about 20 per cent. of them bother to enforce the law on Sundays. It is not only extraordinarily unreasonable that whether one is fined or injuncted and restrained from selling on Sundays depends in which local authority area one happens to live, but grossly unfair.

I know from my experience as the hon. Member for Oxford, East that a shop on one side of the road under a a local authority that was keen to enforce the Act had to compete with a shop on the other side of the road in the area of another local authority that said, "We do not give much of a damn and have neither the resources nor the inclination to enforce the Act." About 26 per cent. of turnover can accrue to a business on a Sunday in these selected trades, and it is outrageously unfair that local authorities should discriminate in that way.

There is a further idiocy. Under article 30 of the treaty of Rome there has been a reference by the courts to the European Court of decisions on the granting of injunctions. That means that existing legislation may be overtaken by decision of the European Court. If the European Court rules, as it is invited to do, that the Shops Act 1950 conflicts with article 30 of the treaty of Rome, which deals with restraint of trade, then whatever the attitude of some hon. Members towards Europe, I for one shall say thank goodness that Europe can introduce a little sanity into our proceedings.

On the matter of sanity, I should like to quote Councillor John Denison, the chairman of the Association of District Councils' general services committee. On hearing about the European reference, he said:

"This is the last straw. The present law is totally discredited and every effort by districts to enforce the law is thwarted even by the courts. These cases show that it is imperative for Government to take urgent action to reform the law."

The law is an abject mess.

Mrs. Gorman: The law is an ass.

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend is right. What should we do about it? The Conservative manifesto was clear. We committed ourselves in that manifesto to bring sense and consistency to the law. I intend to remind all Ministers of that and not just my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office who has given up some important engagements to be here for the debate. I remind my hon. Friends of that commitment and hope that the Government will see it through.

The last Bill in 1986 was hijacked by a minority who impressed their opinions on some of my hon. Friends who, like me, were in extraordinarily unsafe seats. They each received perhaps 100 letters in favour of the system from some of the vast majority of people who already used it, perhaps without knowing that they were abusing it, and could not be exercised to do anything about it at that time. I suspect that things might be different if we had another opportunity to debate such a Bill.

Complete deregulation is the only logical answer. In a speech in his constituency on 10 February the Minister of State, Home Office said that the Government had not changed their views on the issue. He said:

"We still believe that the wholly logical solution is that of total deregulation. But we have to recognise that this was not acceptable to Parliament."

If, for whatever reason—and we can all speculate—Parliament has said that total deregulation is not its wish, we must not insult Parliament by reintroducing the 1986 Bill. We must consider the real and serious objections of some hon. Members to that Bill.

If we do not want to go down the path of total deregulation, we have three options. One is to go down the path of a new list, but a new list would be absurd because it would instantly be arbitrary, immediately anomalous and increasingly ridiculous. There would be great difficulties in enforcing a new list system. Huge resources would be needed to visit every shop that was entitled to be open, because it sold some items that were on the exempt list, to make sure that it was not selling items that were not on the list. That is also nonsense in manpower terms. We will need an army of inspectors and an army of fraught policemen running around deciding whether someone has had the temerity to buy tights or is buying fodder for his horse from an unrecognised inn or farm. How awful that would be.

We could, of course, allow any shop to choose its own restricted hours—perhaps to open for six or seven hours on a Sunday—but I believe that that suffers from the same problems of enforceability and is an avenue down which we should not go.

My Bill would allow any shop to open from noon to 6 pm. It would allow an extension for small shops, because I believe that, on either side of the argument it is generally recognised that there needs to be some protection for small shops. I was advised, that, because of my inadequate drafting, the worker protection clauses in my original draft of the Bill were inconsistent with the wording of the long title. Therefore, I give the House my commitment that, if it approves my Bill on Second Reading, I shall introduce similar worker protection clauses to those contained in the 1986 Bill. I believe that that is the solution that gets nearest to common sense. It was supported by a majority of those participating in the polls. It also has least opposition of any of the proposed schemes. Its advantages are that it is enforceable, that there are no lists, that it is fair and that it retains the special character of Sunday, in that it clearly requires the closure of shops at certain times and a different pattern to be be established from that that applies on the other six days of the week.

I will not proceed further other than to summarise the words of an editorial in the *Evening Standard* some time ago, which said:

"Nowadays you can join a union, run your school, buy your council house or own shares if you so desire. But if you want to buy your baked beans or your wallpaper on the way to church on Sunday, you can't. The outdated and bizarre law preventing Sunday trading remains on the statute books . . . Ministers should have the courage to reintroduce their Bill at the earliest opportunity. Sunday trading is not a wrong but a right."

2.11 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Tim Renton): It would be as well if I intervened at this stage—with apologies to hon. Members on both sides of the House—because if I do not intervene now, in the short space of time available, it may be impossible for me to do so at all.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not challenge who you call, because that is not for us to challenge. I realise that it is a Private Member's Bill, but it is custom and practice to call an hon. Member from one side of the House and then an hon. Member from the other side of the House. I am rather disturbed that you did not seek to catch the eye of Opposition Members, because we had declared in previous debates this morning our interest in getting rid of the previous debate so that we could get on to this one. I am somewhat appalled at the fact that you have called two hon. Members from the Conservative side when Opposition Members would also wish to contribute to this emotive debate. Those of us who are sponsored by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers are worried that we might not be afforded the opportunity to speak on the issue because of the time factor.

Mr. Stanbrook: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It would be unusual to call a Minister immediately after a Back Bench Member has just moved his own Private Member's Bill. This is a Private Member's day. The Government have no business to intervene so soon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Members who have raised these points are very experienced. They will know that it is customary to call Ministers when they rise. The Minister has risen and I have called him.

Mr. Renton: I offered my apologies to hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall be extremely brief in the hope that both the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) will be able to make their contributions during the next 17 minutes. However, I must say that the

[Mr. Renton]

comments of the hon. Member for Ogmore smelt somewhat of hypocrisy, as the Labour Opposition's record in promoting any attempt to reform Sunday trading so far has not only been one of total neglect, but every Labour Member who was present in the House voted against our Bill in 1986. As the record of the Labour party on this has been one of total ignorance and unawareness of the needs and wishes of the consumer, I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's objections.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) for giving us the chance to examine an issue which continues to command a great deal of parliamentary and public attention. It is particularly helpful that my hon. Friend, in a concise and well-phrased speech, has presented a Bill which is simple, straightforward and avoids extremes. That ought to encourage rational and sensible discussion.

I fully agree with my hon. Friend's analysis of the difficulties that face proposals for legislation. There is virtually universal agreement that the present law is badly in need of reform and contains indefensible anomalies which limit public choice and no longer reflect modern needs. Equally, there are wide divisions about the steps that should be taken to achieve reform—and the practical difficulties of achieving it without creating equally indefensible anomalies, often of a very complex nature, are legion. I have found that to be so in my 20 months at the Home Office, in meetings with a great many people representing both sides of the issue, and in my attempts to find a halfway house acceptable not just in the House but to the vast majority of our countrymen. At every turn one is reminded of the sheer difficulty of arriving at a workable compromise.

One reason is that, at heart, none of us wants all seven days of the week to be exactly the same. That would imply a grey monotony and a drab uniformity of which Orwell's thought police would certainly approve. We all want the rhythm of our lives to change on at least one day of the week—be it Friday for the Moslem, Saturday for the Jew, Or Sunday for the Christian. For at least one day of the week, those who live in towns want the high street to be quiet and the pedestrian centre to be peaceful. They would like an absence of heavy duty lorries parked on the double yellow lines and blocking narrow streets as they unload their goods, with coaches and cars queueing behind and honking their horns in irritation. At the same time, as my hon. Friend points out, consumers want on that same idyllic day regularly to buy a newspaper and petrol, to take the family out for a meal, enjoy a game of sport, buy the extra food needed because two of one's children are unexpectedly arriving for supper, visit the DIY store to buy paint and brushes, or the garden centre to purchase plants, fertiliser, a spare trowel, and so on.

It is because of the normal demands of average consumers—certainly not wicked sybarites—that about 5 million people already work on Sunday. That is so often forgotten. It is because of those same demands that Scotland—a more Sabbatarian country than England—imposes no controls whatever on Sunday shopping. If one walks down Princes street or Sauchiehall street on a Sunday, one certainly does not get the impression that Jezebel has taken over. The churches are fuller while some shops are open and some are not without any bother at all.

That is why I find the attitude taken by Scottish right hon. and hon. Members—not one of whom is present in the Chamber this afternoon—so extraordinary. In my experience, the Scots do not usually hesitate to extol the superior virtues of arrangements north of the border where they differ from ours. On this issue, however, they show a strange reluctance to do so. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), for example, who is a Shadow spokesman on home affairs, and who is not in his place this afternoon, can stroll through his constituency on a Sunday and buy anything that he chooses—yet he and his Scottish right hon. and hon. Friends vote against giving consumers in England and Wales the same right. What is the reason for the hon. Gentleman's reticence? One can only assume that he and all Scottish Labour Members are creatures of the Labour Whips Office first, Scotsmen second, and friends of the consumer a very poor third. They will not speak up for a system that operates successfully in their own country. Their opposition to reform in England is a hypocritical sham, and their arguments are just so much humbug.

I return to the notable omission from my hon. Friend's proposals, on which he touched in his remarks. In my judgment, the eventual Bill must provide safeguards for shop workers working on Sundays. I note that if my hon. Friend's Bill goes into Committee he will make certain that clauses to provide safeguards for workers would be included.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) *rose*——

Mr. Renton: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has only just come into the Chamber, as there is very little time available.

Whatever happens to this Bill—it is clear that Labour Members are not at present inclined to help it on its way—I should make it clear that we are committed to finding a way of making sense of the present unsatisfactory position. I have every sympathy for retailers who find the present law confusing, anomalous and inconsistent, and who cannot meet the known needs and wishes of their customers without running the risk of breaking the law.

Mr. Ray Powell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has just said that Labour Members were not trying to help the Bill on its way. As you are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, arrangements were made before this debate so that it could start. If those arrangements had not been made through the usual channels, the debate would not have been allowed to begin. The Minister should withdraw his remark, as he was fully conversant with those negotiations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a point of argument, not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Renton: It is possible, for example, that the Bill points to the next stage in the process of bringing sense and order to this obscure and complicated corner of the law. However, we need to be clear about its objectives for Sunday mornings. I am slightly fearful that the limit of 3,000 sq ft may be a little too wide and might have too great an impact on the number of shops that stayed open in the High street, but that is another point that we could consider in Committee. I know that the Shopping Hours Reform Council, under the leadership of Sir Basil Feldman, is anxious to take that further, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I will be pleased to give the

council all the help that we can. I take this opportunity pay tribute to the work of the council and Sir Basil for the dedicated and conscientious way in which they have attempted to build a consensus in favour of change. Their achievement in the areas of agreement that now exist has been considerable, and they continue to play an important role in finding an acceptable basis for legislation. I encourage all concerned to respond to their efforts.

The law places the responsibility for enforcement fairly and squarely on local authorities. It is a matter for their discretion and judgment, and, although current references to the European Court are relevant to the future status of the law, there is clearly no reason why they should get in the way of the ordinary process of enforcing the 1950 Act in the courts when local authorities think it appropriate.

Mrs. Gorman *rose*——

Mr. Renton: With respect to my hon. Friend, I am about to conclude my remarks. I hope that she may yet have a chance to catch your eye before 2.30, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The question of the reform of Sunday trading is unfinished business for the Government but, as I have said before, we are in no hurry to finish it until we have a consensus which commands maximum support in the House and throughout the country on a subject that is certainly dear to all Conservative hearts, even if it is widely ignored by the Labour party. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest for the proposals that he has briefly put today, and I wish him well in his efforts.

2.23 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I note with interest that because of the time that the Minister has taken up—and taken away from Back Benchers—he is part and parcel of the probable talking out of the Bill, which contradicts the argument that he has put.

The Bill's explanatory memorandum states that part of its purpose is to abolish the restrictions on premises

"where a retail trade or business is carried on to serve customers from the hours of twelve noon to 6.00 pm"

Hon. Members of all parties are aware that we have recently had a debate on a Bill about Sunday sport and that those provisions would have enabled some retail trading to take place on that day. As the explanatory memorandum points out, if the Bill were allowed to proceed today, it would cause yet another anomaly within the racing industry. That is an important point because it would mean that betting shops in the high streets of Britain would be able to open on Sundays. Conservative Members might say that that is irrelevant because there would not be any horse racing because hon. Members, and especially Opposition Members, managed to prevent a Bill that would have allowed that.

However, because of the new technology and the investment that has been made by those in the bookmaking industry outside the United Kingdom, because of SIS—Satellite Information Services—and news satellite services, racing could be beamed live to British betting shops. If the betting shops in our high streets were open, clearly the workers in those shops would have to work on Sundays. That would change the Bill and the purpose of these arguments in the House, which has clearly rejected the arguments for Sunday sport. Anyone who has any doubt about that need only consider the investments that have been made by the big four betting chains in Southern Ireland. In the past 18 months the four big betting houses of Ladbroke and Co, Coral's, Mecca Bookmakers Ltd and Hill's have purchased more than 250 betting shops in Southern Ireland. Because SIS is now available, it is possible to beam overseas races live to this country. The betting industry has also made major investments in other countries. Negotiations are currently taking place to purchase betting and gambling rights in Belgium and France. Betting rights have already been agreed in California and Ohio in the United States. British betting chains are already working towards the possibility of beaming races live, at all hours of the day and night, which would allow betting in the high streets in Britain. That is a serious matter.

Another serious concern relates to workers' rights in the retail trade. We must question whether those who have prepared the Bill have considered its effect on people who work in shops. I do not think that that has been thought through. The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who promoted the Bill, has rightly pointed out——

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Does my hon. Friend agree that the hasty and ill-thought-out nature of the Bill has been shown up by the fact that its promoter had to admit that there were problems about protecting the rights of workers?

Mr. Meale: I entirely and absolutely agree. The argument that at some later stage the hon. Member for Epping Forest would try to ensure that protection clauses were inserted into the Bill is unacceptable to hon. Members of all parties. Members of Parliament are not shop workers and do not have to face the possibility of working a seven-day week. Many hon. Members will argue that they work a seven-day week and 24 hours of the day, but as a fellow Member of Parliament I deny that that happens. I think that Members of Parliament have good terms and conditions. They do not have to put up with regularised work over a seven-day period, which people on low pay and with bad conditions have to face in other industries.

Mr. Ray Powell: Does my hon. Friend recall the Minister's words about the Government's attitude to the Bill and to shops legislation? My hon. Friend has participated on numerous occasions in debates on shops legislation. Does he recall that on many occasions the House has rejected any suggestion that legislation should be enacted to allow Sunday trading?

Mr. Meale: That is right. Hon. Members have to ask themselves why the Government are seeking to introduce Sunday trading legislation by means of a private Member's Bill. It is important to remember that fact because, although it is the normal practice, the Minister did not allow individual Back-Bench Members——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Private Members' Bills

ABORTION (FINANCIAL BENEFITS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

CHANNEL TUNNEL ACT 1987 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Not moved.

TROPICAL HARDWOODS (CONTROL) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not printed.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 May.

ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN RETIREMENT BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 5 May.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not hear an objection, although I am sure that you did. We have had this discussion before. I should be grateful for your advice on the subject in this Session of Parliament. The Bill has been moved six times but it has never been debated. It has been objected to on every occasion by the Trappist tendency on the Treasury Bench. It would be helpful if 9 million pensioners knew who it is that does not want the Bill to be debated in the Chamber and who wants to block any discusson of a measure that would eliminate poverty among the elderly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We have had this discussion many times before at 2.30 on Fridays. The procedure that has been followed is perfectly in order. The hon. Gentleman will recollect that the Select Committee on Procedure considered the matter fairly recently and recommended that there should be no change in the procedure.

POLL TAX (RESTORATION OF INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Question is, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must deal with this first. I asked, Second Reading what day?

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Under the procedures of the House, I moved the Bill and there was no objection. You should have said that the Bill had been given a Second Reading, and the next stage would have been the Committee stage, but you did not do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can deal quickly with the hon. Gentleman's point. An objection at any time during the proceedings is in order. It does not necessarily have to be when the title of the Bill is first read out. There was an objection as soon as I put the Question on Second Reading. Consequently I asked the hon. Gentleman "Second Reading what day?"

Mr. Cohen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can it be right——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There can be no further points of order.

Mr. Cohen *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have explained the procedure to the hon. Gentleman. He has heard the explanation on more than one occasion at 2.30. I repeat that when I put the Question on Second Reading objection was taken. According to our procedure, that means that the Bill is not able to proceed. All that I am then able to do is to ask the hon. Gentleman to name a day for Second Reading.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you explain exactly how we move through the various stages of a private Member's Bill? As I understand it, if no objection is taken when the mover has nominated today for Second Reading, we have moved on to the Second Reading stage. If there was no objection, we should have moved on to Committee——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. In this case, the objection was made when I put the Question on Second Reading. Had the Question been agreed to, the Bill would have received a Second Reading. But the objection was taken before that stage was reached and as a consequence the objection stands.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall listen to the hon. Gentleman, but I remind him that we have other business. We have been through this on many occasions on Fridays. I understand the frustration of hon. Members, but I must remind them that the Select Committee on Procedure looked at the matter fairly carefully and they may wish to refresh their minds and look at the reasons that the Select Committee gave for not recommending alterations to our procedures.

Mr. Corbyn: I share your concern about the procedures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that the Select Committee will reconsider the procedure for Friday afternoon objections. We are not dealing with that problem at the moment. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) quite properly and correctly moved the Bill and none of us heard any objection——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I distinctly heard objection. Therefore, I said, "Objection taken", as I am obliged to do.

Mr. Corbyn *rose——*

Mr. Cohen *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall not listen to any more points of order as they are getting dangerously close to arguments with the judgment of the Chair.

CHLOROFLUOROCARBONS (CONTROL) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

ABOLITION OF DOMESTIC RATES ETC. (SCOTLAND) ACT (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 12 May.

INDECENT DISPLAYS (NEWSPAPERS AND WORKPLACES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

AGE OF LEGAL CAPACITY (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

GAMING MACHINES (PROHIBITION ON USE BY PERSONS UNDER EIGHTEEN) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

RIDERS OF EQUINE ANIMALS (WEARING OF PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

COUNTING WOMEN'S UNREMUNERATED WORK BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not been printed, so I cannot put the Question.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

CONTROL OF POLLUTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 17th April, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, etc. (negative procedure)), Motions in the name of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Education may be proceeded with, though opposed, for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon; and if proceedings thereon have not been previously disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall then put the Question already proposed from the Chair.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was asked to give a date for the Second Reading of my Bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman gave me a date which was 21 April, and that has been recorded.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Counting Women's Unremunerated Work Bill was presented behind the Chair and, therefore, has been printed. Does that not count?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There has to be a printed text of the Bill before I am able to put the Question.

Ms. Gordon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was presented as a Bill behind the Chair in the previous Session.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The previous Session does not count. There must be a printed text of the Bill in this Session, and my understanding is that there is not one. Therefore, I am not able to put the Question.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you tell me the position on the Poll Tax (Restoration of Individual Privacy) Bill, which is before us today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If a day is named for the Second Reading of any Bill that has been deferred today, the Bill will appear on the Order Paper for that day. That does not necessarily mean that it will be reached. I understand that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) did not name a day for Second Reading, but he can do so by giving an instruction to the Table Office.

Mr. Corbyn: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My question related partly to that and partly to the present status of the Bill. Has the Bill passed its Second Reading and Committee stages so that when it returns it will be for its Report stage, or was it blocked by the Trappists on the Conservative Benches?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I realise that this is a complicated matter, so I shall expand a little on the procedure. Let me read from the report of the Select Committee on Procedure which explained this point. Paragraph 70 states:

"When the titles of private Members' Bills are read over . . . on a Friday, instead of rising to speak or to object, it is open to Members to remain seated but to give their voices as 'No' when the question is put."

Mr. Cohen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is not what happened. No Conservative Member said anything. Therefore, the Bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What I read out is exactly what happened.

Mr. Cohen: I dispute that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order: I am on my feet. I realise the hon. Gentleman's frustration. We have been following a well-established procedure. It applies to Government orders on occasions and to private Bills on other occasions. At the moment, the hon. Members who are raising points of order have not managed to persuade the Procedure Committee or the House that the procedure

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

should be changed. It is my job in the Chair to ensure that our present rules and regulations are observed. That is what I have been doing this afternoon.

Mr. Cohen: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What arrangements will you make to rewrite "Erskine May" on this issue, because you have changed the rules in your ruling today? The Bill received——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have made no changes in the rules. It is open to the hon. Gentleman, if he so wishes, to put the matter to the Procedure Committee.

Maternity Services (East Lancashire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Alan Howarth.]*

2.43 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I welcome the opportunity to draw the House's attention to the concern of right hon. and hon. Members representing east Lancashire constituencies about the inadequate maternity services in the area covered by the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley district health authority. The concern that I shall outline is shared by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Waddington) and my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier) but, because of their ministerial positions, they are unable to take part in the debate. The concern is also shared by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) who is unable to be present because of a longstanding engagement in Cheshire. His interest in the need for improved maternity services is clearly shown by the fact that he raised the matter in an Adjournment debate two years ago.

I wish to make an urgent plea for reconsideration of the place in the North West region's capital programme of the new maternity unit for Blackburn, Hyndburn, and Ribble Valley district health authority. The provision of a centralised maternity unit has been considered urgent since the 1970s, and in 1979 was recognised as the highest priority of the former Lancashire health authority. The regional health authority incorporated the scheme as phase IIIA of a development programme for Queen's Park hospital. After much discussion, it was eventually included in the regional capital programme in 1985, with a start date of 1990-91, which was subsequently put back to 1992-93. As a result of the changes in the approval process, the current status of the scheme and its start date are not known. Current and future problems are so acute that urgent action is needed if a crisis is to be avoided.

At present, district maternity services are provided on three sites—the main consultant unit at Queen's Park hospital, which has 67 beds, the GP unit at Victoria Accrington hospital, which has 15 beds, and the GP unit at Bramley Meade, Whalley, which has 20 beds. The GP unit at Darwen was closed in 1988 because of a substantial fall in the number of births. The authority decided that staff and resources could be used more efficiently by providing a temporary GP unit with 10 beds at Queen's Park hospital.

The problem is accentuated by the fact that between 1978 and 1988 the proportion of births in GP units fell from 30 per cent. to 9 per cent. This change, together with a rise in birth rate, led to an increase in the number of births at Queen's Park hospital from 2,409 in 1978 to 3,591 in 1988—a rise of 49 per cent. Latest projections show that the number of births to residents of east Lancashire will continue to increase to more than 4,500 by 1993. If the current trend continues, most of the births will be at Queen's Park hospital.

The total number of beds and staffing levels in the district reflect the regional average, but unfortunately the combination of a rising birth rate, a three-site operation and a 20 per cent. deficiency in consultant beds has placed enormous pressure on staff and facilities at Queen's Park hospital. Clinicians and midwives are extremely concerned

that the work load has increased to a point at which an effective and safe service can no longer be maintained. In 1985, while the number of births per midwife was 26·88 in the region as a whole and 29·6 in the district, it was a massive 49·44 at Queen's Park hospital—80 per cent. higher than the regional average.

The unit at Queen's Park hospital is clearly extremely busy and junior medical staff cover is inadequate. There is only one registrar for obstetrics and gynaecology. I believe that no other district which delivers 4,000 babies per year has only one registrar. The problem is further compounded by the fact that the registrar has commitments at other sites, particularly Blackburn royal infirmary.

I referred earlier to the debate initiated two years ago by the hon. Member for Blackburn. He reminded the House at that time that:

"The ante-natal clinic is half the size needed for its load. On some mornings 100 patients wait to see doctors, but only four examination rooms are curtained off and"

there are only two small waiting areas

"so some patients must wait in the corridors and some must stand. It is bad enough having to stand to wait for medical treatment when one is otherwise able-bodied, but for women in an advanced stage of pregnancy it is no joke . . . Such is the pressure on beds that no mother stays after birth for more than 24 hours unless she or her baby is ill."—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1987; Vol. 114, c. 767.]

In the two years since that debate, matters have not improved. The special care unit is on the lower ground floor, away from the main area. Only one lift serves the entire facility, sanitary accommodation is in a poor state, and there is no anaesthetic or recovery room. The position is not only wholly unsatisfactory, but grossly wasteful and inefficient.

The figures and examples cited give some idea of the unsatisfactory conditions that patients have to endure and under which the staff have to work. But for the dedication of the excellent medical, midwifery, nursing and ancillary staff at Queen's Park hospital, Accrington Victoria hospital and Bramley Meade hospital, the service would have broken down many years ago. It is sometimes difficult to escape the feeling that the district health authority is being penalised because it has made do with facilities that would not be acceptable elsewhere.

As the starting date of phase IIIA is unknown, the district health authority has had to consider interim measures. In February, the authority decided that bookings for deliveries could no longer be accepted from patients resident outside the district. There is a real danger that bookings for deliveries even from patients resident in the district will have to be refused and that mothers will be sent to hospitals miles away. The district health authority is well aware of that possibility and because it would be totally unacceptable if that happened it has recently agreed that improved delivery facilities and a temporary ward will have to be constructed at Queen's Park hospital in the near future. That is not only unsatisfactory and a poor use of the money available, but carries with it the risk that once we have a temporary ward, poor though it may be, we shall once again be seen to be making do, which may cause further delay in providing the much overdue unit at Queen's Park hospital.

The maternity service in Blackburn is already under pressure, with a high number of births, a high proportion of low weight births and a consequently heavy work load in the central unit. The service is already operating under conditions of considerable risk. The region's guidelines for the operation of general practitioner maternity units cannot be met, which has serious legal implications. The birth rate is forecast to rise significantly by 1993. If that happens and the decline in the number of births at the GP unit continues, the unit at Queen's Park hospital will be unable to cope. The new maternity unit will enable the district health authority to deal with its work load and will allow scarce resources in midwifery and medical staffing to be used more efficiently and with greater cost effectiveness. I ask the regional health authority to recognise the urgency of the situation and to support the view of Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley district health authority that the only solution to the impending crisis—which could have serious legal implications—is to bring forward the new maternity unit in its capital programme. Building on the unit should be brought forward to start in 1989.

I hope that the Minister will feel able to say that he agrees with hon. Members representing constituencies in east Lancashire who say that the present situation is unacceptable. I hope, too, that he will do all that he can to encourage and persuade the regional health authority to find some way of ensuring that this important project is given urgent priority and that a date for the start of construction is decided as soon as possible, so that my constituents and those of other east Lancashire Members may benefit from a safe, efficient and effective service.

I assure my hon. Friend the Minister that we appreciate the enormous improvements in National Health Service provision in east Lancashire in the past 10 years. There has been a £4·5 million redevelopment at Queen's Park with 54 adult acute beds and 46 children's beds replacing wards that were appalling; £300,000 has been allocated for a renal unit at Accrington Victoria hospital and £200,000 has been provided to upgrade the theatres at Blackburn. Those are only three recent examples. Nevertheless, grateful as we are, we should be failing in our duty as Members for east Lancashire if we did not do everything in our power to ensure the urgent provision of the long-awaited maternity unit at Queen's Park hospital.

2.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): Before dealing with the detail of this important subject, I should congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on his success in the ballot. I am aware of the close interest that he has taken over many years in the provision of health care services for his constituents. This debate is yet another example of his continued presure on behalf of the people of east Lancashire. My hon. Friend is no doubt aware that the need for better maternity services in east Lancashire has been accepted by both the district and the regional health authorities. I, too, accept the need for improved maternity services and I hope that my hon. Friend is convinced that the Department of Health takes the matter seriously.

The maternity services for east Lancashire are provided by the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley health authority. I hope that the House will allow me to comment briefly on the provision of patient services generally before responding to the points put to me about maternity services as it is important to set maternity provision in the context of hospital services generally.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

The Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley health authority provides the full range of health care services for a local population of 268,000 people. The health authority's record on achieving improved patient services in recent years is good. Comparing the latest available figures for 1987-88 with those for 1982 we see that the in-patient annual treatment rate is up by 17·3 per cent. from 36,926 to 43,315, the outpatient rate is up by 18 per cent. from 158,000 to 187,000, and the number of persons treated by community nurses in the district is up by 33·2 per cent. from 65,000 to 86,000. Those figures, of course, do not show the increases in the quality of care which have also taken place.

Perhaps a more tangible sign to the local community of the improvement in services locally is the local building programme, which is well advanced, to modernise and upgrade buildings and equipment at Queen's Park hospital, Blackburn. The first phase has been completed and took the first patients in 1987. As my hon. Friend knows, this provided 46 paediatric medical beds and 56 acute medical beds and a range of other patient facilities, all at a cost of £4·6 million. Construction of phase II is due to start this year and will provide 76 geriatric beds and 50 day places and support services, including a new catering department. The total cost will be £8·3 million. Those new buildings and the facilities that they contain will ensure that the improvements in patient care achieved in recent years will continue well into the future, but the building programme must not end there.

With regard to the specific subject raised by my hon. Friend, it may be helpful to the House if I first give some of the background to the maternity services available in east Lancashire. Current district provision is located on three sites—Queen's Park hospital, Blackburn, which has 67 consultant beds, 10 GP beds and seven delivery suites; Bramley Meade maternity home, Whalley, which has 20 GP beds and two delivery suites; and Accrington Victoria hospital, which has 15 GP beds and two delivery suites. The two smaller GP units are nine miles and six miles respectively from the main unit at Queen's Park hospital.

Taken overall, the district has about the right number of maternity beds, but changes in the pattern of work between the GP units and Queen's Park hospital have put the main unit at Queen's Park under considerable strain. I agree about the way in which the pattern of work has changed in the past few years and I agree with my hon. Friend's forecast of the number of births likely to occur in the next decade. The increased pressure at Queen's Park hospital, Blackburn is due not wholly but partly to the desire of general practitioners to refer expectant mothers to a large hospital with a full range of maternity facilites available, and the Department of Health understands that trend, which occurs throughout the country.

That brings me back to the building programme for the district. The solution to the problem is a further phase IIIA of building at Queen's Park hospital to provide extra maternity beds on the main district general hospital site to replace those presently located at the GP units. The health authority is aware however, that even if the phase IIIA capital development could be brought forward it would not be ready in time to solve the immediate problem.

I can reassure my hon. Friend that the Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Authority is aware of the need for immediate action to deal with the problem that I have outlined. The authority has given it the highest priority for action. I know that the full health authority has discussed it at both its last two meetings and that the district general manager has met regional health authority officers to discuss what action can be taken. At its meeting on 5 April, the district health authority made a decision on a further, more substantial measure to deal with the immediate effects of the problem. In conjunction with the regional health authority, it has agreed to erect a temporary building at the Queen's Park hospital as soon as possible. Final decisions have not been made about the extra facilities that this will allow, but it is hoped that it will contain 19 extra beds and two more delivery suites.

I am pleased to announce that, as an exceptional gesture, the North Western regional health authority has agreed to provide additional capital funding of £450,000 to the district to make that building possible, and I am advised that the building will be well founded and of an acceptable quality. It will not be temporary or makeshift but will, I hope, have a long-term use. It will not be a permanent solution to the problem, to which I shall now turn, but it will produce an immediate expansion in the facilities available in the short term.

Clearly the measures that I have outlined must be regarded as short term. I understand that both the district and regional health authorities regard the completion of phase IIIA as the permanent solution. The comments made by my hon. Friend add further weight to that view. When my predecessor spoke about phase IIIA in the Adjournment debate two years ago, she mentioned a start date for it in 1992-93. In the light of the points put to me today, I shall ask the regional health authority to advise me of the implications of achieving that. I mean the implications for the capital programme for the region, the revenue implications for the district and the potential closure decisions on the two smaller facilities to which GPs refer their patients for maternity care. I shall then discuss the details with the regional chairman when I am in the region next month.

In concluding my response to the points put to me during the debate on this important subject I pay tribute to the medical, midwifery and other support staff providing maternity services in east Lancashire. I know that my hon. Friend will join me in that tribute. We all value highly the extra efforts which I know that they have made to safeguard the standard of care that they give to mothers during the present period of difficulties which I hope will shortly be put right permanently.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 4 April 1989

THE ARTS

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister for the Arts what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Luce: In 1988, £23,391 was spent by my office on computer consultancy contracts. The sum was the balance of expenditure payable to AMTEC consulting for work on the Government art collection database project, commissioned in 1987. No money was spent on management consultancy contracts, and no management or consultancy contracts were awarded in the year.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Central Bank Base Rate

Mr. Gould: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing for each quarter since the first quarter of 1979 Britain's central bank base rate as a percentage of the G7 average.

Mr. Lilley: Interest rates in the United Kingdom from the first quarter of 1979 are shown in the table along with the average interest rate in the Group of Seven major industrialised countries.

Three month interest rates

	United Kingdom[1]	*G7 average*[2]
1979		
Q1	12·8	8·6
Q2	12·6	8·9
Q3	14·2	10·0
Q4	16·1	12·2
1980		
Q1	17·9	13·5
Q2	17·1	12·5
Q3	16·0	11·2
Q4	15·4	13·5
1981		
Q1	13·0	13·6
Q2	12·4	14·5
Q3	15·0	15·3
Q4	15·7	13·1
1982		
Q1	14·1	12·9
Q2	13·4	13·0
Q3	11·2	11·4
Q4	10·1	9·7
1983		
Q1	11·2	9·2
Q2	10·2	9·1
Q3	9·8	9·4
Q4	9·4	9·4
1984		
Q1	9·3	9·5
Q2	9·3	10·0
Q3	11·1	10·3
Q4	10·1	9·2
1985		
Q1	13·0	9·1
Q2	12·6	8·6
Q3	11·7	8·2
Q4	11·6	8·3
1986		
Q1	12·4	8·2
Q2	10·2	7·0
Q3	10·0	6·5
Q4	11·2	6·6
1987		
Q1	10·6	6·6
Q2	9·2	6·6
Q3	9·8	6·8
Q4	9·2	7·1
1988		
Q1	9·0	6·5
Q2	8·4	6·7
Q3	11·3	7·7
Q4	12·5	8·1
1989		
[3]Q1	13·0	8·9

[1] Three month interbank rate.
[2] Certificate of deposit or interbank rate.
[3] Average of Monday rates for January, February and first three Mondays of March.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outstanding total of sterling debt of the public sector on *(a)* 6 April 1988 and *(b)* 1 February 1989.

Mr. Lilley: Figures for the outstanding stock of public sector debt are only compiled for the end of each calendar and financial year. The latest available estimate is for the end of 1987-88 when the sterling component of net public sector debt outstanding was £188·2 billion.

Premium Bonds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why he reduced the percentage calculation of prize money for premium bonds from 7¾ per cent. to 7 per cent.; and if there is any current review of the scheme.

Mr. Lilley: The premium bond prize fund rate, like national savings other variable rates, is kept under continuous review and adjusted from time to time in the light of a number of factors.

Excise Duties

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government with respect to the consultation procedure

with the European Economic Community Commission in relation to the revision of excise duties as set out in "Common Market Reports" page 2435; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The procedure to which my hon. Friend refers formed part of the European Commission's proposal of 7 March 1972 for a directive on the harmonisation of excise duty structures. The proposal has not been adopted and Her Majesty's Government are not, therefore, bound by any such consultation procedure.

Alcohol and Tobacco (Taxes)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government have accepted any European Economic Community rules which ensure that changes in its taxes in alcohol and tobacco do not involve non-convergence from the European Economic Community proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: Since we do not accept the Commission's proposals for harmonisation of taxes/excise duties on alcohol and tobacco we have not accepted, nor are we bound by, any current EC Commission proposals involving the convergence of rates of tax on these items. All such proposals on matters of taxation would require unanimity before they could be binding on member states.

Benefits and Allowances

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table, on the same basis as his reply to the then hon. Member for Kensington, *Official Report*, 3 December 1985, columns *173-4*, showing the rates of child benefit, single person's tax allowance and married man's allowance at current and at 1979 prices, in April each year from 1979 to 1989.

Mr. Lawson: The information is in the table.

	Child benefit (£ per week per child)		*Single person's tax allowance (£ per annum)*		*Married man's tax allowance (£ per annum)*	
April	*Current prices*	*1979 prices*[1]	*Current prices*	*1979 prices*[1]	*Current prices*	*1979 prices*[1]
1979	4·00	4·00	1,165	1,165	1,815	1,815
1980	4·00	3·29	1,375	1,129	2,145	1,762
1981	4·75	3·48	1,375	1,008	2,145	1,572
1982	5·25	3·52	1,565	1,049	2,445	1,638
1983	5·85	3·77	1,785	1,150	2,795	1,801
1984	6·50	3·98	2,005	1,228	3,155	1,933
1985	6·85	3·92	2,205	1,263	3,455	1,979
1986	7·00	3·89	2,335	1,298	3,655	2,032
1987	7·25	3·87	2,425	1,293	3,795	2,024
1988	7·25	3·72	2,605	1,337	4,095	2,102
1989	7·25	[2]3·45	2,785	[2]1,326	4,375	[2]2,083

[1] Figures converted to 1979 prices using the movements in the RPI between April of each year.
[2] This will depend on the level of the RPI in April 1989. The figure given is derived by applying the annual increase in the year to February 1989 (the latest month available) to the level of the RPI in April 1988.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what was the total amount spent by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Lilley: The total amount spent by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1988 was £3,527,225.

The consultancy firms awarded contracts in management and computer consultancy, excluding hardware and software purchases are as follows:

Firm	*Assignments*
Advanced Computer Services Limited	Intelligence networks
Apricot	Network upgrading
Arthur Andersen	VAT work planning systems
Arthur Young	Strategic database
BIS Applied Systems	Cabling requirements
British Telecom	Customs handling of import and export freight (CHIEF)
Bull (Honeywell)	Extension of computerised intelligence system
Computer Centre	Network upgrading study
Comshare	Operational planning system
Coopers and Lybrand	Board's information system
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Personnel information development
E O S Y S	Local office technology system
Ernst & Whinney	VAT visit assistant expert system Mini strategy study Personnel information system
Essex & City Computers PLC	Data capture system
FCMC PLC	Personnel information development
Ferranti Computer Systems Ltd.	Customs entries—post clearance adjustments
Hoskyns	CHIEF
Hunterskill South	Registry computerisation
ICL	Senior collectorate information Networking Documentation and planning program VME performance
Inforem	Gaming machine licence system Local area networks
Kerman Associates	GDN implementation
Logica	Integrated tariff
Mindworks Partnership	Investigation division operational planning system

Firm	*Assignments*
NCC	CBT training study
Octagon	Telephone initiative study
PA Consultants	Project management: CHIEF
PACTEL	CHIEF
Peat Marwick & McLintock	Activity costing study Budget data capture Accounting controls
Praxis	Budget and manpower planning system
Regional Software & Support Services	Computer ordering and account systems
RPT Computer Installation Limited	Cabling requirements
SPI Limited	Operational planning systems
System designers	Management information systems
Touche Ross	Operational planning systems Reliability study: mainframes
University of Bath	Application of the financial management initiative
University of Bristol	Report on monitoring VAT
Welcome Software Technology	Database study
Yale Data	CHIEF

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount spent by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Lilley: In 1988 total HMSO expenditure for these purposes was £230,000. Contracts awarded during 1988 were:

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Metron Technology Limited	Capacity planning for mainframe computers
MCP Management Consultants	Development of revised remuneration scheme
Touche Ross Management Consultants	Review of customer coding system

National Debt

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those organisations which have received or will receive repayments arising from his Budget decision to repay £14 billion of the national debt and the payment for each organisation.

Mr. Lilley: Detailed information about an individual's or organisation's holdings of debt is confidential. However, figures for net transactions in public sector debt by the main sectors of the economy are given in "Financial Statistics" table 2.6 and the *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin* table 8.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the public sector borrowing requirement five, 10, 15 and 20 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is as follows:

Public sector borrowing requirement

	£ billion	*Ratio to GDP (per cent.)*
1968-69	0·4	¾
1973-74	4·3	5¾
1978-79	9·2	5¼
1983-84	9·7	3¼

These are in marked contrast to 1988-89 when the public sector is expected to show a net repayment of £14 billion, equivalent to 3 per cent. of GDP. The Government have also been able to budget for a £14 billion surplus in 1989-90.

Pensions Schemes (Abatement)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will describe the purposes of the curent review of the policy of abatement in public service pension schemes; whether it will take account of shortages in qualified manpower, including the shortages of qualified teachers identified by the Department of Education and Science; whether it will take account of the abolition of the earnings rule for national insurance pensioners; when he expects the review to be concluded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The long-standing policy of abating the public service pensions of people who are re-employed in the public service is currently being reviewed to see whether it needs to be modified in the light of the wider pensions choices now available and current management needs. Particular attention is being given, among other things, to the implications of the introduction of personal pensions and the effects which the existing policy has on recruitment and retention. The abolition of the earnings rule for national insurance pensioners is not immediately relevant to the abatement of public service pensions. The Government Departments responsible for the major public service schemes, including the teachers' superannuation scheme, are contributing to the review. It is expected to be completed this summer.

Taxpayers (Confidentiality)

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure that the new safeguards of confidentiality for taxpayers, to be included in the Finance Bill, in no way interfere with the Government's efforts to trace and seize the illegally gained assets of drug traffickers.

Mr. Lilley: Safeguarding the confidentiality of taxpayer information will not interfere with efforts to trace and seize illegally gained assets of drug traffickers. Provision in the Finance Bill 1989 will be confined to unauthorised disclosure of information held in the exercise of tax functions and relevant to tax or duty and, as drafted, does not include such matters as illegal trafficking in dangerous drugs which are not subject to tax or duty.

Johnson Mathey

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if, in the light of the allegations contained in the book "The Marcos Dynasty" by Sterling Seagrove he will set up an inquiry into Johnson Mathey's bullion dealing.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 March 1989]:* No.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he computed the figure for the percentage of public sector debt to have been repaid by 31 March 1990 referred to in the *Official Report*, 15 March, column 431.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The "Financial Statement and Budget Report" (paragraph 6.04) forecast that the stock of net public sector debt would be £157 billion at the end of 1988-89. On the assumption that the change in the stock of debt in 1989-90 will be the same as the PSDR forecast for that year, the stock of debt will be £143 billion at the end of the year. This is some 16 per cent. lower than the stock of debt at the beginning of 1987-88, estimated to have been £171 billion.

OPCS (Interviewers)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to introduce Civil Service pension provisions for interviewers employed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Office of Population Censuses and Surveys interviewers, in common with other staff engaged on a fee-paid basis, are not eligible for membership of the principal Civil Service pension scheme. Their level of fees, out of which they are able to make their own pension arrangements, was set in the knowledge that the employment is not pensionable; and, in management's view, interviewers are paid the appropriate remuneration for the job. However, the trade union representing the staff concerned intend to submit evidence to support a claim that the total remuneration package for interviewers employed by OPCS should be substantially uplifted by providing for their membership of the PCSPS. The Treasury and OPCS management will consider further the claim for pension ability very carefully in the light of this evidence; but it would be necessary to look for an offsetting adjustment to the present level of fees in order to provide for membership of the PCSPS, or some other pension arrangement, unless an increase in the remuneration for interviewers were found to be justified.

Tax Changes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update, to take account of the 1989 Budget, the information on tax changes contained in his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 21 October 1986, *Official Report*, columns *807-8*.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information is in the tables. For each financial year shown, the tables compare the yield from the tax regime in that year with the 1978-79 tax regime. All estimates are based on a provisional 1989-90 income base projected from the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes and all tax regimes have been indexed to 1989-90 levels by reference to the statutory formula. The comparisons therefore allow for budgetary changes in income tax rates and allowances, but not for any changes since 1978-79 in the definition of the income tax base. Further information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Reduction(+)/Increase(−) in income tax compared with 1978-79 indexed regime (£ million)

Range of total income in 1989-90 (£)	*Number of units paying tax in 1989-90 (million)*	*1979-80*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Under 5,000	2·1	170	−30	80	170	200	240	350	350
5,000 to 10,000	6·5	930	210	510	810	1,050	1,500	2,160	2,160
10,000 to 15,000	5·2	1,400	750	1,100	1,390	1,770	2,480	3,400	3,410
15,000 to 20,000	3·3	1,230	750	1,060	1,280	1,620	2,290	3,100	3,100
20,000 to 30,000	2·8	1,730	1,170	1,580	1,800	2,260	3,140	4,220	4,220
30,000 to 50,000	1·1	1,790	1,290	1,630	1,760	2,010	2,490	3,500	3,500
50,000 to 70,000	0·2	1,000	820	970	1,000	1,040	1,120	1,790	1,790
Over 70,000	0·1	2,400	2,230	2,690	2,720	2,730	2,780	4,720	4,720
Total	21·3	10,660	7,190	9,620	10,920	12,690	16,040	23,250	23,260

Average gain(+)/loss (−) per tax unit[1] (£ per annum)

Range of total income in 1989-90 (£)	*1979-80*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Under 5,000	60	−10	30	60	70	80	120	120
5,000 to 10,000	140	30	80	120	160	220	320	320
10,000 to 15,000	270	140	210	270	340	480	660	660
15,000 to 20,000	380	230	330	390	500	700	950	950
20,000 to 30,000	610	410	560	640	800	1,110	1,490	1,490
30,000 to 50,000	1,580	1,130	1,440	1,560	1,780	2,190	3,090	3,090
50,000 to 70,000	4,550	3,730	4,410	4,570	4,740	5,090	8,130	8,130
Over 70,000	16,670	15,510	18,680	18,870	18,990	19,280	32,790	32,790
Total	470	320	430	490	560	710	1,030	1,030

[1] Average gains and losses are calculated by reference to the estimated number who would be liable to pay tax under the indexed 1978-79 regime; this number is some 1,200,000 greater than the numbers paying tax in 1989-90, some 900,000 in the income range below £5,000 and 300,000 in the range £5,000 to £10,000.

Note: All information is in terms of tax units—that is, married couples are counted as one and their incomes combined.

Taxable Income

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish his best estimates of the aggregate taxable income for 1988-89 in each *(a)* county, *(b)* former metropolitan county, *(c)* the Greater London area, *(d)* metropolitan district and *(e)* London borough area.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 22 March 1989]:* The latest year for which estimates for counties in Great Britain are available is 1986-87: they are provided in the accompanying table. I regret that estimates for Northern Ireland counties, for metropolitan districts and for London boroughs are not available.

County	*Taxable income £ million*
English counties	
Cleveland	1,320
Cumbria	1,340
Durham	1,150
Northumberland	850
Humberside	1,590
North Yorkshire	2,090
Cheshire	3,660
Lancashire	4,440
Derbyshire	1,990
Leicestershire	1,980
Lincolnshire	1,170
Northamptonshire	1,180
Nottinghamshire	2,070
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	1,530
Shropshire	906
Staffordshire	2,180
Warwickshire	1,360
Cambridgeshire	1,490
Norfolk	1,650
Suffolk	1,380
Bedfordshire	1,360
Berkshire	2,600
Buckinghamshire	1,950
East Sussex	1,530
Essex	5,690
Hampshire	3,870
Hertfordshire	3,240
Kent	5,620
Oxfordshire	1,310
Surrey	6,360
West Sussex	2,190
Isle of Wight	258
Avon	2,330
Cornwall	773
Devon	2,070
Dorset	1,720
Gloucestershire	1,420
Somerset	1,060
Wiltshire	1,400
English metropolitan counties	
Tyne and Wear	2,020
South Yorkshire	2,330
West Yorkshire	4,450
Greater London	16,300
West Midlands	5,310
Greater Manchester	3,440
Merseyside	2,600
Welsh counties	
Clwyd	837
Dyfed	575
Gwent	729
Gwynedd	431
Mid Glamorgan	737
Powys	249
South Glamorgan	909
West Glamorgan	577
Scottish regions	
Borders	213
Central	650
Dumfries	237
Fife	797
Grampian	1,290
Highland	337
Lothian	1,690
Strathclyde	4,440
Tayside	810
Island authorities	153

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Brazilian Rain Forest

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with Brazil about the destruction of the rain forest.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised this question during the visit to London on 9-10 March by the Secretary General of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He left Sr Flecha de Lima in no doubt as to the strength of feeling in this country about the rate of destruction. I also conveyed our concerns during that visit, as I also had done earlier in conversation with the President of Brazil during my visit in November 1988.

I refer the hon. Member to my speech on the rain forests issue in the debate on 13 March following the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further programmes he intends supporting in Brazil to assist in arresting the destruction of the tropical rain forest.

Mr. Chris Patten: Following discussions with the Secretary-General of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during his recent visit to London, we are considering, at his request, what support further to that being provided for the Maraca rainforest we could give to scientific work or technical assistance for the rain forests. We shall also be discussing these issues with the Secretary-General of the Brazilian Ministry of the Interior when he visits London later this month.

Sudan

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further measures he is taking to assist the United Nations Organisation's and other efforts to achieve peace and relief in the Sudan, following the recent United Nations conference in Khartoum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 3 April my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Overseas Development announced a further contribution of £5 million towards relief operations in Southern Sudan. Of this, £2 million will be channelled through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), £2 million through United Nations Agencies (UNICEF and the World Food Programme) and £1 million through British non-government organisations. This is in addition to the £14·4 million in emergency aid provided to Sudan in 1988. We continue to urge all parties in Sudan to work for the speedy implementation of the plan of action agreed at last month's United Nations conference in Khartoum.

West German Foreign Minister

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his West German counterpart; and what matters will be discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend will next meet Herr Genscher at the Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 24-25 April where a range of European Community issues will be discussed.

Iran

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to European Economic Community Governments about the decision of those member states who have replaced their ambassadors in Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: EC Foreign Ministers agreed on 20 March that their heads of mission, who had been temporarily withdrawn from Tehran for consultations, could return to Iran if national circumstances required this. Returning heads of mission will carry the strong message that the Iranian death threats remain unacceptable.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the recent agreement of the Council of Foreign Ministers on relations with Iran made provision for member states to consult the United Kingdom if they wished to reappoint ambassadors to Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have kept in close contact with our European partners over our response to the Iranian threats against Salman Rushdie and his publishers. We have been heartened by the solidarity shown by the Twelve. The strong position of principle adopted on 20 February was reaffirmed by EC Foreign Ministers on 20 March. It was never intended that heads of mission should stay away indefinitely. The decision that heads of mission could return to Iran was taken after full consultation between the EC Foreign Ministers. The ban on high level contacts remains in place.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many member states of the European Economic Community closed their embassies in Iran following the decision of the United Kingdom to break off diplomatic relations with Iran.

Mr. Waldegrave: No member states of the EC closed their embassies in Iran following the break in diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Iran. All EC member states withdrew their heads of mission in Tehran for consultations in response to the Iranian threats against Salman Rushdie and his publishers.

Crete Campaign (Medal)

Dr. Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, in the light of the feelings of those who fought in the Crete campaign in 1940-41, who have not had official recognition in the form of a medal, he will waive any formalities which debar the award or acceptance of such a medal.

Mr. Eggar: Any official foreign medal designed to be worn which might be offered to British subjects in connection with the Crete campaign 1940-41 would be subject to the Foreign and Commonwealth Orders Regulations 1969, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House in reply to a question by my right

hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) answered on 27 May 1988. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not have discretion to waive the provisions of these regulations, which are applied consistently to all requests from foreign Governments to bestow honours, decorations and medals on United Kingdom citizens.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Eggar: Expenditure for 1988-89 financial year on management and computer consultancy was:

	£
Management consultancy	68,699
Computer consultancy	1,422,900

Individual contracts awarded during the year were:

Management	
Moon Associates	Study of FCO publications
Market and Opinion Research International	Staff communications survey
Jaycroft Limited	United Nations documents in the FCO
Brian J. Stent	Purchasing arrangements in FCO
Pergamon Technical Services International	Re-organisation of diplomatic services procedure
Metier	Resource and project management information study

Computer consultancies	
Data General Ltd.	Management information system
Enever Systems Ltd.	Management information system
Phase 3 Systems Ltd.	Management information system
Kinesis Computing Ltd.	Development of overseas systems
BIS Applied Systems Ltd.	Development of overseas systems
Express Computer Consultants	Development of financial system
Logica UK Ltd.	(i) Development of overseas systems (ii) FOLIOS consultancy studies
Computer Sciences Co. Ltd.	FOLIOS consultancy studies
Systems Designers Ltd.	FOLIOS consultancy studies
Psychometric R & D Management Systems	FOLIOS consultancy studies
PA Consultancy Systems	FOLIOS consultancy studies
The Instruction Set	(i) FOLIOS consultancy studies (ii) Administration records consultancy
Price Waterhouse	Administrative records consultancy
Information Resources Ltd.	(i) A financial estimates system (ii) An overseas estates financial system
Kings Brook Information Associates	Replacement of library and records system

Discharged Prisoners

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state against each member country of the European Community what amount of money, travel allowance or other benefit, is given by that country *(a)* to British citizens and *(b)* to its own nationals on discharge from prison in that country.

Mr. Eggar: Payments made to British nationals on discharge from prisons in other European Community countries are listed below. Except for Portugal, no member state makes a distinction between British and host nationals in their rules governing discharge from prison.

Belgium: No discharge grant. Half of any earnings paid on release. Deportees with funds are required to pay their rail/ferry fares. In needy cases, prison social/welfare funds may contribute to homeward travel costs.

Denmark: No discharge grant. Journey paid to place of residence within Denmark. Deportees' journey home paid for, if unable to pay themselves.

France: No discharge grant. Prisoners can seek assistance from probation committees in their home towns. If no funds are forthcoming from prisoners' resources, prison can provide ticket to place of former residence, including country of origin.

Federal Republic of Germany: Practice varies between states (Länder). No discharge grant. A proportion of any earnings paid on release. Access to social security benefits. Travel payments range from cost of travel to nearest consular/diplomatic representation to cost of travel to the United Kingdom plus minimal subsistence.

Greece: No discharge grant. If prisoners have no funds they are referred to the nearest Organisation for Employment and Manpower which may grant relief to cover board and lodging for maximum of three months. No travel expenses.

Ireland: Gratuity paid on discharge, based on work carried out during period of incarceration. Surface travel is paid from prison to home address, the city where case was tried or to a convenient port. In exceptional circumstances ferry/air fares are paid to enable discharged prisoners to return to country of origin.

Italy: No discharge grant or travel expenses. Where an expulsion order has been issued and the prisoner has no funds the Italian Government will pay for repatriation.

Luxembourg: No discharge or travel expenses. Prisoners are expected to fund travel home etc. from money earned whilst in prison. However, prisoners without funds would get a ticket from a prison welfare group or the Ministry of Justice. Those resident in Luxembourg before their arrest are also eligible for accommodation costs to be paid while unemployed.

The Netherlands: No discharge grant. Discharged prisoners without funds are entitled to social security income support. Travel home, within the Netherlands, is paid. Deportees with funds must contribute to the fare home.

Portugal: No discharge grant or travel expenses are paid to prisoners of any nationality. In cases of real need, Portuguese nationals may receive basic subsistence and travel expenses.

Foreign nationals are referred to their embassies if they have no funds. The Portuguese Government will pay all or part of the repatriation costs of those prisoners served with expulsion orders who cannot pay themselves.

Spain: No discharge grant paid automatically. In cases of need, prisoners may apply to Ministry of Justice for a travel allowance, accommodation expenses and family allowance. The Spanish Government pay for repatriation where expulsion is part of the sentence.

British Citizens (Convictions and Imprisonment)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out for the last five years as at a common date, and against each country in which they are held, the number of British citizens convicted in those countries and imprisoned there and against each (i) the nature of the offence and (ii) the duration of the sentence.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

British Citizens (Imprisonment)

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens presently imprisoned overseas have dependent relatives in the United Kingdom who are in receipt of income support or other benefits.

Mr. Eggar: We have no knowledge of the personal financial circumstances of dependents of British citizens imprisoned overseas.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 8 February, *Official Report*, column *731*, *(a)* which private security firms have been used by his Department, *(b)* where they have been deployed and *(c)* at what cost to his Department in each year from 1979 to the current date; what was the total cost to his Department of the duties undertaken by Zeus Security Guards Ltd. in 1982 and 1983; what were the access control duties performed by Zeus Security Guards Ltd. in 1982 and 1983.

Mr. Eggar: Detailed information on this subject is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Falkland Islands

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in view of changes of fishing and commercial policy by the Falkland Islands Government, if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards British fishing companies in the Falklands and the role to be played by British interests in maintaining the economic development of the islands.

Mr. Eggar: We welcome the opportunities which the Falklands fishery offers British fishing companies and encourage them to make the effort and commitment to participate in its successful exploitations. So do the Falkland Islands Government. British commercial interests are playing a key role in infrastructural development, including a new telecommunications system, secondary school, housing and other building works. We shall continue to encourage British participation in the expanding economy of the Falkland Islands.

Lomé Conventions

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government hopes will emerge from Lomé IV.

Mr. Chris Patten: We hope that the current renegotiation will produce a successor to Lomé III which will continue to provide a framework for effective co-operation between the Community and the ACP states in the spheres of both trade and aid.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will now withdraw the British tranche to the Lomé conventions, in view of the conduct of the Ethiopian Government.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 27 February at column *1*.

Private Investment

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the level of private capital funds invested overseas for development purposes as a percentage of gross national product during the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The latest available figures for private direct investment, bank lending and grants by voluntary agencies in developing countries, as a percentage of gross national product, are as follows:

	Per cent.
1983	0·64
1984	0·55
1985	0·18
1986	0·77
1987	−0·05

TRANSPORT

Road Casualties

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of fatal and serious road casualties among children aged 5 to 14 years for each year from 1965 to the nearest available year between October and February for the following hours of the day *(a)* 7 to 8 am, *(b)* 8 to 9 am, *(c)* 9 to 10 am, *(d)* 3 to 4 pm, *(e)* 5 to 6 pm and *(f)* 6 to 7 pm.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is available only from 1979. This is given in the table.

Fatal and serious casualties among children aged 5-14 years by time of day between October and February: 1979-87

	7-8 am	8-9 am	9-10 am	3-4 pm	4-5 pm	5-6 pm	6-7 pm	Rest	Total
1979-80	47	404	108	418	729	423	263	1,295	3,687
1980-81	63	354	79	415	586	383	232	1,286	3,398
1981-82	46	260	79	400	562	325	232	1,204	3,108
1982-83	39	346	81	471	553	365	231	1,237	3,323
1983-84	50	356	60	487	581	372	261	1,227	3,394
1984-85	48	324	78	434	492	356	271	1,143	3,146
1985-86	46	309	88	469	489	348	244	1,192	3,185
1986-87	37	267	68	355	402	286	223	960	2,598

Heavy Lorries

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations have been made to him regarding *(a)* exceeding the speed limit and *(b)* hazardous overtaking involving heavy lorries; what prosecutions have taken place in the past years with regard to these two offences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department receives many representations about the full range of road safety issues.

We devote considerable effort to improving driver behaviour. Last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced a package of measures dealing specifically with motorway safety, and aimed in particular at improving driver behaviour.

Hazardous overtaking is not a specific offence in road traffic law, but drivers who perform dangerous manoeuvres can be prosecuted for either reckless or careless driving.

Statistics on road traffic offences are published annually by the Government statistical service in the supplementary tables on offences relating to motor vehicles England and Wales.

Lydd Airport

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to plans to extend Lydd airport in terms of the increased air traffic over south-east England.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A planning application by Lydd Airport Group Limited to extend the airport runway was called in for determination by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in July last year. The inspector who conducted the inquiry into the proposal has now reported to my right hon. Friend, who will announce his decision as soon as possible.

Random Breath Testing

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has relating to New South Wales regarding *(a)* the percentage reduction in the average number of fatal crashes in the five years after the introduction of random breath testing, *(b)* the percentage reduction in the average number of alcohol-related fatal and serious accidents in the four years after the introduction of random breath testing and *(c)* the percentage reduction in the average number of drivers and riders killed over the legal limit in the four years after the introduction of random breath testing.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Random breath testing was introduced in New South Wales in December 1982. It has been accompanied by a sustained publicity campaign and a high level of police enforcement activity which aims to test one in every three drivers per year.

Since 1982 the percentage of drivers killed while over the legal limit has fallen from 40 to 34 per cent. in 1986—a drop of 6 per cent.

Over the same period in this country, the decline has been from 36 to 25 per cent., a drop of 11 per cent.—nearly double that of New South Wales.

Assessments of enforcement strategy in New South Wales and other Australian states where RBT is used frequently draw attention to the impact of high levels of police activity and publicity as important factors, as distinct from the actual method of enforcement.

Research carried out by the school of behavioural sciences, Macquarie university, and the traffic authority of New South Wales in 1988 gives the following information:

(a) the number of fatal crashes fell by 22 per cent., from an average of 22·12 per week in the five years before the introduction of random breath testing to an average of 17·23 per week in the five years after;

(b) the number of alcohol-related fatal and serious injury accidents fell from an average of 13·43 per week in the five years before to 8·67 in the four years after, a decline of 35 per cent.;

(c) the average number of drivers and riders killed while over the legal limit dropped from 4·36 per week in the three years before RBT to 2·81 in the four years after, a fall of 36 per cent.

Simple comparisons and statistics may be misleading; for instance, the legal limit for blood alcohol content in New South Wales is 50 mg/ml and in this country it is 80 mg/ml.

Microlight Aircraft

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many prosecutions have been made under section 48(1)(a) of the Civil Aviation Act 1949; how many of these involved microlight aircraft; and, in this respect, what was the outcome of each.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Section 48 of the Civil Aviation Act 1949, which provided power to give effect in the United Kingdom to the Rome convention 1933 relating to damage caused by aircraft to third parties on the surface, was never brought into operation. It was repealed by section 26 of the Civil Aviation Act 1968.

Goods Vehicles (Speed Limiters)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out, in tabular form, in respect of each of the countries of the EEC, in respect of goods vehicles with a weight greater than 3·5 tonnes: the maximum speed in miles per hour on motorways and the maximum speed in miles per hour on non-motorway roads; whether there is currently a mandatory requirement to fit speed limiters;

and what is the proportion of all such vehicles registered within that country which are estimated to have been fitted with such speed limiters.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The following is derived from a table provided by the EC Commission in January 1989, in respect of heavy goods vehicles:

	Maximum speeds (mph)		
Member State	*Motorway*	*Expressway*	*Other Road*
Belgium	56	56	37
Denmark	43	43	43
FR Germany	50	37	43
France	50	50	37
Greece	37	37	37
Republic of Ireland	35	35	35
Italy	50	37	37
Luxembourg	37	37	37
Netherlands	50	50	37
United Kingdom	60	50	[1]40
Spain	62	50	43
Portugal	50	43	37

[1] 30 mph in built-up areas.

There are a few variations according to operating weights. The information must be treated with some caution because the classification of roads varies between member states.

The information requested on speed limiters is not available, although I understand that in France new vehicles over 10 tonnes gross vehicle weight must be fitted with speed limiters and that in the Federal Republic of Germany mobile cranes must be so fitted. In the United Kingdom, coaches are required to be fitted with speed limiters over the next two years. The number of speed limiters fitted voluntarily to heavy goods vehicles is not known.

Service Areas (Baby Changing)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will take steps to ensure that facilities provided for the changing and feeding of babies at motorway service areas can be used by male as well as female parents or carers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At new motorway service areas we require a nursing mothers' room. Operators are not required by their leases to provide such facilities at older motorway service areas. Some already do so voluntarily and others will be encouraged to provide them when other alterations are being made.

Considerations of privacy, in particular for breast feeding, preclude any general sharing of such facilities by men looking after babies. We do not currently propose to require any separate provision for men. If demand builds up for this, we will reconsider the position in consultation with the operators.

Cross-Channel Freight Traffic

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Stockport, *Official Report*, 20 March, column *399*, whether he is proposing to make any assessment of cross-Channel freight traffic in total and by mode by 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Department has no plans to make such an assessment.

Passenger Ferries

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, further to his reply of 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *120-1*, he will list the names of the small number of roll-on/roll off passenger ferries built before 1980, where modification is not a realistic proposition and the names of their owners; and when in each case they plan to withdraw them from service.

Mr. Portillo: All 73 pre-1980 ferries in use at the moment comply fully with the current international convention for safety of life at sea (SOLAS). The Sheen report recommended that a higher standard of stability in the damaged condition should be applied to these ships. The majority of the ships which did not comply with this higher standard have been, or will be, modified by their owners to achieve compliance.

The owners have made known the names of the ships for which we understand modification is not a realistic proposition. These are (registered owner's name in brackets):

Darnia—(James Fisher & Sons Ltd.)
Earl Granville—(W & G Industrial Leasing Ltd.)
Earl Harold—(Sealink UK Ltd.)
Tynwald—(Sealink UK Ltd.)
St. Ola—(P & O Ferries Ltd.)
Pride of Canterbury—(P & O European Ferries (Dover) Ltd.)
Pride of Hythe—(P & O European Ferries (Dover) Ltd.)

Initial indications are that the owners will not retain these ships for more than about another three years. Discussions on that continue.

Airline Safety (Departmental Warning)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish the full text of the warning and the supplementary circular his Department issued on airline safety following the discovery of a bomb in a radio cassette player in Frankfurt in October 1988.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No. It is not our practice to publish communications between the Department and the industry about aviation security matters. To do so only benefits terrorists and hinders security.

Thames Line River Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, South, *Official Report*, 16 March, column *284*, he will give the considerations and calculations relating to his decision to provide approximately £400,000 of public support to Thames Line River Services in central London, together with the relevant vote in the current estimates, the expected means of payment and any conditions relating to the grant.

Mr. Portillo: The decision to provide up to £500,000 of grant took into account the benefits to the community of relief of road congestion and the encouragement of development of riverside areas in need of regeneration. The grant will be met from the administration and transport services vote (class VIII, vote 2). Payment of grant is limited to is application to the promotion and improvement of the services, and is conditional upon a private sector contribution of up to £2 million, to be paid on a pro rata basis, and to the provision of appropriate management reports and accounts.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated or actual number of passengers and passenger miles, respectively, carried by Thames Line River Services in the year 1988, or financial year 1988-89, together with the comparable estimates for the financial year 1989-90; and what is the expected public subsidy, or its range, per passenger and per passenger mile, respectively.

Mr. Portillo: Thames Line estimates that some 138,000 passengers were carried in its first nine months of operation to February 1989. A progressive and substantial increase in patronage is expected during the next three years, but the forecast of the business are commercially confidential.

Sir Keith Bright (Resignation)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he can now announce the terms on which Sir Keith Bright resigned from London Transport.

Mr. Portillo: The terms are still under discussion.

European Maritime Policy

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the proposals from the Commission of the EEC for a second stage of European maritime policy; what time limit he has set for the production of such proposals; whether such proposals have yet been forwarded by the Commission to the Council; and if he will make representations to the Commission on the need for greater urgency in dealing with this matter.

Mr. Portillo: We continue to press the Commission. We understand that it aims to produce proposals for the June Council of Transport Ministers.

Trunk Roads (Review)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has completed his review of the trunk road network; and if he is now in a position to further improve roads benefiting Suffolk and Norfolk.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The review of the trunk road programme is in progress. Possible improvements to trunk roads benefiting Suffolk and Norfolk are being considered along with many other candidates for inclusion on their merits for a share of the resources available. We expect to make an announcement by early summer.

Railway Accident (Warrington)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to place in the Library a copy of the detailed report of the accident at Arpley sidings, Warrington, on 27 February, when this has been submitted by the British Railways Board to the railway inspectorate at the Department of Transport.

Mr. Portillo: The railway inspectorate is to hold an inquiry into this accident. The report will be published.

Britannia Bridge, Limehouse

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who was consulted on the effects on safety of a reversible lane on the Britannia bridge on the Commercial road at Limehouse; and if he will make the documents containing the advice available in the Library.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The decision that site restrictions and safety considerations rule out the use of a reversible lane at Britannia bridge was based on the professional judgment of the Department's officials.

British Rail (Provincial Services)

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he proposes to authorise any further investment in British Rail's provincial services.

Mr. Portillo: We have authorised the purchase by British Rail of another 56 class 158 express vehicles at a cost of about £20 million. They will be built at BREL immediately after the 138 vehicles which we approved in January. The first of all these new vehicles should be entering service by early 1991.

London Assessment Studies

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many visits he has made to any of the route options of the east London assessment study; how many meetings he has had with hon. Members of constituencies affected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have not made any such visits. It is for the consultants to assess their options at this stage. I have had meetings with most hon. Members concerned.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department has about the use of routes in the east London assessment study area by heavy lorries, commuter cars and public transport; and if he will make a statement on comparative figures for each of the last eight years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information that the hon. Member requests is not available except at disproportionate cost.

The most comprehensive sources of information for the east London assessment study area is the consultants' stage 1 report, copies of which are in the Library.

Figures available for traffic entering central London in the morning peak hours for the following years are:

	Cars	*Heavy goods vehicles*	*Buses/coaches*
1979	128,400	3,300	4,200
1981	129,500	2,750	4,350
1983	124,400	2,450	4,500
1985	127,000	2,000	4,300
1987	123,350	1,900	3,650

Source: DTP.

Similar figures for the numbers of commuters in the morning peak are:

	Cars	British Rail	London Regional Transport rail	London Regional Transport bus	Total including coaches and cycles
	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands	Thousands
1980	184	412	305	103	1,031
1981	173	394	336	105	1,037
1982	197	390	283	99	1,013
1983	180	384	323	97	1,026
1984	180	386	351	94	1,049
1985	171	401	364	94	1,069
1986	166	421	381	91	1,093
1987	162	449	403	79	1,125

Sources: British Rail/London Regional Transport.

The figures show that the total number of commuters has increased by 9·1 per cent. since 1980, that the number commuting by car has fallen substantially and that road traffic entering central London in the morning peak has decreased.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he has received against the public walk road option in the east London assessment study; how many phone calls, have been made to his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A number of representations, including phone calls, have been received from action groups, amenity groups, residents associations, members of the public and hon. Members about the consultant's options that involve use of the public walk.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to announce his intentions with regard to any routes affected by the assessment studies in London.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is too soon to say.

Highgate—Finsbury Park (Public Walk)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has any plans for a light railway development along the route of the public walk between Highgate and Finsbury Park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: No. A light railway is one of the options being considered by the consultants for the east London assessment study.

Trawlers (Medical Supplies)

Mr. Barry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the medical supplies required by the latest European Economic Community directive for *(a)* a trawler at sea for more than eight hours and *(b)* a trawler at sea for more than 24 hours.

Mr. Portillo: No such directive has been adopted; nor has any proposal for a draft directive yet been made by the Commission to the Council of Ministers.

Lindane Container (Channel)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he anticipates the recovery of the Lindane container lost in the Channel.

Mr. Portillo: The commercial container of Lindane was lost in an area of the Channel in which under a bilateral agreement the French authorities are responsible for taking counter-pollution action. They are undertaking an extensive search for the lost container and the Department's marine pollution control unit is maintaining close contact with them. As the container has not yet been located, a time scale for recovery cannot be predicted.

Departmental Mail (Bomb Attack)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he gave any indication to the Post Office on or before 16 March as to when his Department believed that the letters to airport authorities and Pan American Airlines had been posted; and what representations he made to the Post Office in relation to the Post Office's plans to make a statement refuting allegations that the letters had been lost;

(2) what contact took place between the Post Office and his Department on matters relating to the letter he sent to airport authorities and Pan American Airlines warning them of the threatened bomb attack in the week beginning 12 March; and what assurances were sought by, or given to, the Post Office by his Department on whether a statement would be made on 16 March by his Department on this matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Post Office officials were in touch with those of the Department during the afternoon and evening of 16 March. We made it clear that the circular dated 19 December had not been posted until later and that the Department had no complaints about the way the Post Office had handled it. My right hon. Friend said so that afternoon.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the breakdown of category A prisoners in England and Wales under the groupings *(a)* convicted Irish Republican Army terrorists, *(b)* international terrorists, *(c)* murderers, *(d)* armed robbers, *(e)* rapists, *(f)* drug dealers, and *(g)* others (i) in total and (ii) listed by each prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information readily available centrally is given in the following table. Further figures could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Convicted adult male prisoners in category A in prisons in England and Wales on 31 December 1988: by type of offender

	IRA terrorists	*Other terrorists*	*Sex offenders including some murderers*	*Armed robbers and drugs dealers*	*Others (mainly murderers)*	*Totals*
Albany	7	5	27	17	7	63
Birmingham	—	—	—	2	2	4
Bristol	—	—	—	—	2	2
Chelmsford	—	—	—	—	1	1
Coldingley	—	—	—	—	1	1
Frankland	7	4	11	22	15	59
Full Sutton	4	1	7	11	8	31
Gartree	9	4	3	19	15	50
Hull	—	—	1	—	3	4
Leeds	—	—	2	—	1	3
Leicester	3	—	2	4	1	10
Lincoln	—	—	2	—	3	5
Liverpool	—	—	1	1	1	3
Long Lartin	7	5	16	22	19	69
Manchester	—	—	1	1	2	4
Parkhurst	7	2	2	14	17	42
Wakefield	—	2	49	1	18	70
Wandsworth	—	—	2	18	2	22
Winchester	—	—	—	—	1	1
Wormwood Scrubs	2	—	13	3	8	26
Totals	46	23	139	135	127	470

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* successful escapes and *(b)* unsuccessful escape attempts there have been from prisons in England and Wales by category A prisoners in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During this period, there have been two incidents involving escapes from within prison establishments. In 1980, three unconvicted prisoners who had been provisionally placed in category A escaped from Brixton prison. In 1987, one provisional and one confirmed category A prisoner escaped from Gartree prison in a helicopter. Detailed inquiries were conducted following both incidents and measures were taken to prevent a similar escape in the future.

The other information is not available in the form requested by my hon. Friend. Maximum security prisons have a high level of physical security designed to deter and prevent either an assisted or an unassisted escape attempt. Security measures are constantly under review.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards *(a)* parole and *(b)* rehabilitation for category A prisoners.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No prisoner, whatever his security category, is prevented from having his case considered for release on parole. However since one of the main concerns in considering suitability for parole is the safety of the public, it is unlikely that a prisoner whilst in category A —the highest security category—would be released on licence.

Category A prisoners are offered as full and constructive a regime as is consistent with the requirements of security and there are many opportunities for them to improve, for example, work and social skills and education. The aim, as with all prisoners, is to help them lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether category A prisoners are provided with assistance in drawing up their resettlement plans.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Yes. Assistance is freely available on request to all prisoners, regardless of security category, from the probation service and welfare organisations.

Prisoner (Statistics)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the numbers of category A, B and other prisoners in each prison in England and Wales, listed by prison and by county address.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The latest information readily available centrally is given in the following table.

Population[1] of adult male sentenced prisoners in prisons and remand centres in England and Wales on 31 December 1988: by security category and prison

Prison or remand centre (County)	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*Not recorded*	*Total population*
Remand centres						
Latchmere House (London)	—	—	—	—	27	27
Risley (Cheshire)	—	1	30	1	35	67
Local prisons						
Ashford (Surrey)	—	—	4	1	16	21
Bedford (Bedford)	—	3	47	21	23	94
Birmingham (West Midlands)	4	58	297	82	88	529
Bristol (Avon)	2	104	133	30	110	379
Brixton (London)	—	3	8	2	113	126
Canterbury (Kent)	—	5	33	21	38	97

Prison or remand centre (County)	A	B	C	D	Not recorded	Total population
Cardiff (South Glamorgan)	—	14	62	16	184	276
Chelmsford (Essex)	1	1	3	3	88	96
Dorchester (Dorset)	—	31	33	2	17	83
Durham (Durham)	—	57	287	50	320	714
Exeter (Devon)	—	21	49	13	130	204
Gloucester (Gloucester)	—	10	100	36	52	198
Hull (Humberside)	4	29	113	59	34	239
Leeds (West Yorkshire)	3	69	207	44	208	531
Leicester (Leicestershire)	10	28	91	20	37	186
Lewes (East Sussex)	—	13	49	11	52	125
Lincoln (Lincolnshire)	5	21	196	35	34	291
Liverpool (Merseyside)	3	147	608	53	424	1,235
Manchester (Greater Manchester)	4	100	434	77	248	863
Norwich (Norfolk)	—	12	120	14	46	192
Oxford (Oxfordshire)	—	7	51	39	28	125
Pentonville (London)	—	10	144	47	397	598
Reading (Berkshire)	—	10	48	19	49	126
Shrewsbury (Salop)	—	8	83	10	77	178
Swansea (West Glamorgan)	—	13	51	10	64	138
Wandsworth (London)	22	222	400	51	761	1,456
Winchester (Hampshire)	1	71	158	16	47	293
Wormwood Scrubs (London)	26	52	18	28	271	395
Closed training prisons						
Acklington (Northumberland)	—	—	394	8	23	425
Albany (Isle of Wight)	63	215	58	3	45	384
Aldington (Kent)	—	—	79	20	20	119
Ashwell (Leicestershire)	—	—	310	31	24	365
Blantyre House (Kent)	—	—	77	1	—	78
Blundeston (Suffolk)	—	151	162	36	61	410
Camp Hill (Isle of Wight)	—	—	382	41	66	489
Channings Wood (Devon)	—	—	457	41	24	522
Coldingley (Surrey)	1	64	151	46	35	297
Dartmoor (Devon)	—	352	220	26	28	626
Erlestoke (Wiltshire)	—	3	168	25	15	211
Featherstone (West Midlands)	—	—	482	44	11	537
Frankland (Durham)	59	303	17	—	16	395
Full Sutton (North Yorkshire)	31	147	69	2	7	256
Garth (Lancashire)	—	207	23	—	106	336
Gartree (Leicestershire)	50	228	18	—	13	309
Grendon (Buckinghamshire)	—	116	71	5	11	203
Haverigg (Cumbria)	—	—	246	11	18	275
Highpoint (Suffolk)	—	—	384	88	253	725
Lancaster (Lancashire)	—	—	234	15	9	258
Lewes (East Sussex)	—	80	22	3	20	125
Lindholme (South Yorkshire)	—	—	527	131	44	702
Littlehey (Cambridgeshire)	—	—	403	14	24	441
Long Lartin (Hereford and Worcester)	69	308	12	2	10	401
Maidstone (Kent)	—	334	144	35	27	540
Northeye (East Sussex)	—	—	101	33	89	223
Norwich (Britannia) (Norfolk)	—	—	119	36	39	194
Nottingham (Nottinghamshire)	—	115	154	15	11	295
Parkhurst (Isle of Wight)	42	168	14	1	10	235
Portsmouth (Kingston) (Hampshire)	—	122	7	5	9	143
Preston (Lancashire)	—	1	303	19	23	346
Ranby (Nottinghamshire)	—	—	331	12	—	343
Send (Surrey)	—	—	62	16	24	102
Shepton Mallet (Somerset)	—	—	210	16	13	239
Stafford (Staffordshire)	—	—	695	50	53	798
Stocken (Leicestershire)	—	—	283	7	4	294
Swaleside (Kent)	—	171	19	8	194	392
Thorp Arch (West Yorkshire)	—	—	126	21	8	155
The Verne (Dorset)	—	—	552	20	22	594
Wakefield (West Yorkshire)	70	563	36	17	43	729
Wayland (Norfolk)	—	—	362	58	55	475
Wymott (Lancashire)	—	—	606	49	71	726

Prison or remand centre (County)	A	B	C	D	Not recorded	Total population
Open training prisons						
Ford (West Sussex)	—	—	—	493	—	493
Highpoint (Suffolk)	—	—	—	69	—	69
Kirkham (Lancashire)	—	—	—	537	—	537
Leyhill (Gloucestershire)	—	—	—	370	—	370
Morton Hall (Lincolnshire)	—	—	—	155	—	155
North Sea Camp (Lincolnshire)	—	—	—	89	—	89
Rudgate (West Yorkshire)	—	—	—	305	—	305
Spring Hill (Buckinghamshire)	—	—	—	199	—	199
Standford Hill (Kent)	—	—	—	387	—	387
Sudbury (Derbyshire)	—	—	—	496	—	496
All prisons and remand centres	470	4,768	12,938	4,922	5,596	28,694

[1] The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate: detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.

Crime (South Wales)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors account for the fact that the incidence of crime has risen in south Wales when it has fallen nationally.

Mr. John Patten: In south Wales in 1988, 116,988 offences were recorded compared to 111,642 in 1987. Burglaries fell by 5 per cent., but there were 7,000 more thefts of or from motor vehicles. The south Wales police will be targeting car crime in the coming year. Members of the public can help by taking sensible crime prevention measures.

Prisoners (AIDS)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what social or medical studies are being made of prisoners identified as HIV positive, with or without symptoms, in Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Statistical monitoring of reported cases is undertaken by the directorate of prison medical services for management purposes.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training and how frequently prison officers, other staff and prisoners at Her Majesty's prison, Winson Green receive on AIDS-related illnesses; and by whom this is carried out.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Health care staff have received specialised training in the care and support of patients with AIDS and AIDS-related conditions, including in some cases practical experience in a National Health Service AIDS unit. External AIDS counselling courses have been attended by some staff including chaplains. A more general training programme, provided by the establishment's own training staff and intended for all operational staff, provides basic health and safety information and an understanding of the nature of AIDS and HIV infection at a level appropriate to their task of managing infected prisoners with no signs or symptons of illness. All operational staff have received some training of this kind and over 75 per cent. have seen a specially made prison service training film. This is a continuing programme. Prisoners have access to a wide range of educational material including videofilms and leaflets. A new educational package produced by the Department centrally for use throughout the prison service will be brought into use in the near future.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners at Her Majesty's prison Winson Green, identified as HIV positive *(a)* with symptoms and *(b)* without symptoms are being kept in prison hospital or other special accommodation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: For reasons of medical confidentiality it is not our practice to disclose the number of current cases reported by individual establishments.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Hurd: The Home Office spent approximately £3,572,000 on management and computer consultancies in 1988. The following contracts were awarded to management or computer consultancy firms by the Home Office in 1988:

Consultancy	Assignment
Express Computer Consultancy	Software development for Financial Division
Grafton	Benchmark preparation for Police National Computer
Grafton	Software support for Police national computer
Captain Hannant, Captain Stubbs	Study on the application of cir legislation to police operations
Hunterskill	Programming support for Prison Service

Consultancy	Assignment
ICL	Systems analysis for Immigration and Nationality Department
ICL	Bootle Computer Bureau Network Support
ICL	System sizing for Immigration and Nationality Department
IN2	Post Administration programming support
JSB	Database support for computerisation of central records
Kerman Associates	IT Division technical support
Logica	Fire Department Brigade requirements study
Logica	Local Area Network study for Immigration and Nationality Department
Metier	Bootle Computer Bureau project management tool support
Oasis	Intelligency Knowledge Based Systems study
Oracle	Bootle Computer Bureau software support
PA Management Consultants	WARC project management
PA Consulting	Investment Appraisal support for Immigration and Nationality Department
PA Consulting	Police National Computer Office project management support
PA Technology	Proposal Evaluation: Automatic Fingerprint Recognition
P-E Computer Services	Bootle Computer Bureau programming support
Peat Marwick McClintock	Review of laundry service
Peat Marwick McClintock	IND Relocation Study
SIA	Fire Statistics Section hardware sizing trial
Software AG	Police National Computer Office software support (two contracts)
St. George's Medical School	Technical support from Forensic Science Service
Touche Ross	Management systems strategy for prison industries
TSC Ltd.	Police National Computer Office Operating System Support
Thornhill Computer Services	Bootle Computer Bureau programming support
Dr. R. L. Williams	Reviewing fingerprint evidence
Yale Data	IT Division technical support
Aberdeen University	Technical support for Scientific Research and Development Branch
Ampex	Videofile testing
Batalas	Police National Computer Office Quality Assurance support
BBN	Technical support for Scientific Research and Development Branch
BIS	Magistrates Court contingency study
BIS	Financial Systems support
Cooper and Lybrand	Assistance with training seminars in Prison Service
Computer Search and Selection	Immigration programming support
CCTA	IT Division Post Implementation Review
Data Logic	Local Area Networks study
Dataflex	Programming support for Prison Service
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Improving Clerical Support Services to Her Majesty's Prison forms
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Study of potential feasibility of private sector involvement in the remand system

Consultancy	*Assignment*
Digitus	IT Division technical support
Eosys	Police Requirements Network study
Ewbank Preece	Microwave study

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount spent by the Metropolitan police in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Metropolitan police in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that the Metropolitan police spent an estimated £1,220,000 on management and computer consultancies in 1988-89.

The following contracts were awarded in 1988:

Firm	*Contracts*
Geoff Ford	Consultancy on Mechanical and Electrical Branch Control Information Systems.
Digitus	Programming advice on Territorial Operations Systems.
Safe Computing	Setting up software for police payroll.
Chess Valley	Enhancement to G10 crime statistics input system.
Carnell	Consultancy on civil staff payroll.
ICL	Technical support on hardware and software including installation of new system and super-dualling of two ICL 2988 machines.
ICL	Software enhancement.
Gerard Systems	Artemis Consultancy.
Gresham Software Skills Ltd	Operating system conversion from DME to VME.
STS Nescourse	Consultancy advice on Querymaster software package.
Hoskyns	Technical advice on VMS operating system
Prolog	Programming work on cheque reconciliation suites.
Pergamon Infotech	Provision of documentation etc. for Cautions Index project.
Unisys	Software enhancement for police computers at outer London magistrates' courts.
CCTA	Crime Report Information System (CRIS) benefits evaluation.
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Data modelling consultancy.
Intra Systems	Consultancy to review CRIS training programme.
Scicon Ltd	Production of simulation model of a CID office.
Ernst & Whinney	Data envelope. Study of MP divisions.
Unisys	Manpower services in connection with replacement command and control system.
Peat Marwick McLintock	Re-location of stores.
Peat Marwick McLintock	Review of options for direct supply of goods to users.
Wolff Olins	Corporate Identity consultancy.
D.W.J. Consultants	Procurement consultancy
Touche Ross	Catering consultancy.
Hay Management Consultants Ltd	Alternative civil staff pay arrangements.

Police National Computer (Report)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy to publish the report of the review of the police national computer being carried out by County Nat West when it has been completed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This report has only just been received and we have yet to decide how best to carry out consultations on its conclusion.

Fatal Accidents (Police Vehicles)

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fatal accidents during 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 involved motor vehicles driven by suspected criminals who were being chased by the police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Data Protection Act 1987

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *254*, what representations he has received concerning amendments to the terms of the Data Protection Act 1987.

Mr. Renton: I have received no other representations on those aspects of the Data Protection Act 1984 to which the hon. Member's earlier question referred.

British Citizens

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning information supplied by Her Majesty's Government to the San Francisco immigration and naturalisation service about Mrs. Nina Hutchinson which formed the basis of the decision to refuse her entry into the United States of America in December 1988; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what representations he has received concerning exchanges of information under the proposed incorporation of the European treaty on mutual assistance into British law; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what information on British citizens is made available by Her Majesty's Government to other countries;

(4) how many complaints have been received from British citizens who have travelled abroad concerning information about them supplied by Her Majesty's Government to other Governments.

Mr. Hurd: Two hon. Members have forwarded representations from the Troops Out movement claiming that one of its members was detained and removed from the United States of America on the basis of information provided by the Government. I am not prepared to comment on particular arrangements for exchanging information with other Governments or on individual cases. Apart from these representations, we are not aware of any other complaints about information supplied to other Governments.

The Troops Out movement also expressed concern about the effect, as regards the exchange of information, of the United Kingdom's ratifying the European convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters. Legislation would be required before the United Kingdom could accede to this convention, the purpose of which is to enable one state to assist another in the investigation and prosecution of criminal offences. It is a precondition of such assistance that criminal proceedings should be pending in the requesting state, or that initial investigations should have begun with a reasonable expectation that such proceedings will ensue.

Category A Committee

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the role and composition of the category A committee.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The role of the committee is twofold:

(i) to consider whether prisoners recently convicted of very serious crimes should be placed in security category A, which is reserved for those inmates whose escape from prison custody would be highly dangerous to the public or to the police or to the security of the State;

(ii) to review, at least annually, the cases of all those who have been made category A;

and to make recommendations to the Director General of the Prison Service.

The committee comprises senior officials of prison service headquarters, governors of prisons normally holding category A prisoners, and a senior police officer.

Mr. Albert Baker

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received since 1979 concerning the case of Mr. Albert Baker, currently prisoner No. 241254 in Her Majesty's prison Long Lartin.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Numerous inquiries and letters from hon. Members and noble Lords and members of the public have been received in support of Mr. Baker's requests to be transferred to Northern Ireland, but a detailed enumeration could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Metropolitan Police (Public Relations)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost to the Metropolitan police of the public relations budget for each year since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that expenditure by the Metropolitan police on all forms of recruitment and other advertising, and other promotional literature, in each financial year since 1979-80 is as follows:

	£
1979-80	759,000
1980-81	967,000
1981-82	1,062,000
1982-83	1,028,000
1983-84	1,675,000
1984-85	1,747,000
1985-86	1,868,000
1986-87	2,269,000
1987-88	2,836,000
[1]1988-89	3,397,000

[1] Estimate.

Foleshill Information and Advice Centre, Coventry

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the

compatibility of that part of his Department's letter of 20 January, reference RDI 88 622/56/5, to Mr. Christopher Farmer, director of education at Coventry city council, which rejected section 11 funding for posts at the Foleshill information and advice centre, on the grounds that they would be assisting all sections of the community, with that part of the letter which rejected section 11 funding for a development work for the Asian sheltered residential accommodation on the grounds that the postholder would be working just for Asian clients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 16 March 1989]:* I am satisfied that the extracts from this Department's letter, which have been taken out of context, as can be seen from the full text which I have placed in the Library, are in no way incompatible. Coventry city council's applications for the posts in question did not identify what special need, particular to the relevant Commonwealth community, the proposed posts would address. Identification of such need is an essential pre-requisite for approval of section 11 grant. If Coventry city council requires further clarification, officials at the Home Office will be pleased to explain the reasons for refusal in greater detail.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those referred by the employment service to ET complete their assessment with a training agent; what percentage of those who complete their assessment stay six days with a training manager; and what percentage of those originally referred by the employment service stay six days with a training manager.

Mr. Nicholls: It is estimated that to the end of January 1989 about 55 per cent. of those referred from the Employment Service to training agents agreed action plans. The number of people staying at least six days with a training manager is estimated to be about 80 per cent. of the total number of those who agree action plans. The number of trainees who stay at least six days with training managers is about 45 per cent. of the total of those referred from the Employment Service to training agents.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what have been the numbers and percentages of those who started on ET who did not complete their course.

Mr. Nicholls: It is estimated that of the 153,300 unemployed people who had started on employment training between 5 September 1988 and the end of January, about 23,000 or 15 per cent. had left the programme early without completing their planned programme of training. People leave the programme for a number of reasons including starting work.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the qualifications gained by trainees in the ET programme.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what funds his Department has allocated for paying training bonuses to employment training trainees; how much has been paid out to date; and if he will give a breakdown showing how much of that money has been paid out in each of the local areas administered by the Training Agency.

Mr. Nicholls: These arrangements are funded from the overall resources available for employment training and there are no separate area budgets for this purpose. Up to end of February 1989 £84,518 has been paid.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been paid out through the underpinning arrangements to ET managers and agents since the start of employment training; and if he will give a breakdown showing how much of that money was paid out in each of the local areas administered by the Training Agency.

Mr. Nicholls: The underpinning arrangements are funded from the overall resource available for employment training and there are no separate area budgets for this purpose. Up to the end of February 1989 a total of £9,159,751 has been paid out to training managers, and £422,613 to training agents.

Vocational Training

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the total numbers of *(a)* adult employees receiving vocational training, *(b)* young persons 18 years and under receiving vocational training and *(c)* all persons of employment age receiving vocational training in each year since 1970 or in those years for which figures are available.

Mr. Cope: Estimates from labour force surveys of persons receiving job-related training, are shown in the table. The labour force survey did not include questions on training which can be used to produce comparable estimates prior to 1984.

Job-related training[1]—Great Britain, spring estimates

thousands

Year	*Employee of working age[2]*	*Persons aged 16 to 18 years*	*Persons of working age[2]*
1984	1,806	461	2,518
1985	2,088	574	2,897
1986	2,176	530	3,003
1987	2,380	530	3,313
[3]1988	2,776	589	3,806

[1] Persons who said that in the four week period prior to interview, they had taken part in any education or training connected with either their current job or a job they might be able to do in the future.
[2] Men aged 16 to 64, women aged 16 to 59.
[3] Preliminary estimates.

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to fund research into the causes and effects of repetitive strain injury, and into preventive measures for it.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive is currently supporting two projects investigating repetitive strain injury through its extramural biomedical research programme, at the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh and the university of Birmingham.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Cope: The total amount spent by my Department (excluding the Training Commission/Agency) in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, was £2·3 million.

The following firms were awarded consultancy contracts by the Department of Employment group, excluding the Training Commission/Agency, during 1988:

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
AIMS Systems	Quality Assurance review for major system
AMP	Software support for small firms centres system
Arthur Andersen	Benefit related payments system
Arthur Young	Consultancy for review of anti-fraud measures in selected systems Consultancy for management information systems Work on ES payments manual and testing of market National unemployment benefit system terminal study Glasgow Jobseeker Central processing in London and the South-East (SUPERVACS project)
Colin Minton and Associates	PER privatisation
Coopers and Lybrand	Consultancy and advice on major system
D. E. Barnard Systems	SUPERVACS—Technical assurance co-ordination SUPERVACS—Risk analysis for disaster site
Falkman Communications	Advice on ES internal communications
Datasolve	Computer-based training for the national unemployment benefit system
Ferrari Software	Consultancy for local area network specification
Hoskyns	Management of computer systems Software enhancements to major systems
HUSAT	National unemployment benefit system
ICL	Use of new techniques on major systems IDMS X consultancy Resolution of mainframe loading problems Quickbuild and data specification requirements
ITM Ltd.	Restart
Kennedy Robinson Business Development Ltd.	ES executive board workshop
Learmouth and Burchett Management Systems	PROMPT study
Lloyd Northover	Work on ES corporate identity
Makrotest	A study of the small firms service
Michael Wesley Associates	Production of careers service publicity guide
PA Consultants	A review of Government support for the tourism industry IT strategy for ES SEPACS study Feasibility study on SUPERVACS enhancements
Pannell Kerr Foster Associates	A review of the statistical needs of the tourism sector
Peter Seal	Quantity surveyor for structural surveys
Professor Colin Gallagher (Newcastle University)	Research into the role of small firms in job generation in the United Kingdom
Sphinx Ltd.	Adjudication office automation
Thurrock Computing Services	RESTART study
Yale Data	SSADM consultancy for major personnel project Advice on standards for testing critical systems Adjudication office automation

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by the Training Commission in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Training Commission in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Cope: The Training Agency spent a total of £1·1 million during the calendar year 1988 on mangement and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases. No management consultancy contracts were awarded during 1988. The list of computer consultancy contracts awarded during 1988 is as follows:

Consultants	*Subject of Assignment*
J. Ackroyd	A consultant to enhance the existing database for the YTS expenditure forecasting model
Bacie	A consultant to look after a database of "LCP" information
Butler Cox	A consultancy to assist the Training Commission in evaluating the office technology project
Camtec	To provide assistance with the development of the MSC network
CCTA	To put a business case together (including investment appraisal aspects) for a local area network for the Training Commission at Moorfoot To undertake a scoping study of funding, charging, and management aspects of the MSC network
Codd & Date	To advise the Training Commission on the definition of a relational database
Compact Business Computers LTD	A consultant to develop a database for the employment training underpinning system
Compsoft	A consultant to provide guidance on the most efficient way to design and implement an accident database
Coopers and Lybrand Associates	A consultant to review the commission's corporate financial management strategy Consultant to provide project management support
CMG Information Services	System analysts to assist FSR with their development work
EOYSYS	A consultant to carry out a strategic review of the videoconferencing requirements within the DE Group
GTC Project Ltd.	Creation of a database for the employment training initiative monitoring system
Harwell Computer Power	Consultancy advice on the use of "*STATUS*"
Hunterskill	A consultant to provide SSADM support on the PDP project
I-NET	A consultant to review the Training Commission's network
The Instruction Set	To provide the Training Agency with advice and guidance on the selection of a software environment
The Instruction Set	A consultant to assist in the evaluation of the software environment
National Council for Education	To provide TAP with consultancy in the areas of strategy, planning, R and D projects
The Networking Centre	A consultant to produce a business analysis for the Moorfoot site
Omicron	A consultant to write a purchase order management system, and train staff in its use
PA Computers and Telecommunications	To provide advice and assistance in deciding where, and how, MSC's "MASCOT" system should be replicated in MSC HO A study to look into the office technology input to the infrastructure project
PE Consulting Services	System analyst to assist FSR with their development work
Presenting with Style	A consultant to provide training in the use of "Wordperfect" software for senior officers' secretaries
Sherington Software	A study to evaluate packages for transferring data from "*ALL*" to micros Programmers to assist the Training Agency on the maintenance and development of the TOPS MINIS System
Chrissie Strickland	A consultant to look after a database of "LCP" information

Consultants	Subject of Assignment
R. H. Wilmott	A study into the Training Agency's X.400 profile and messaging requirements taking into account "COSIP" message handling system
M. Wilson	A consultant to carry out changes to the "Supercalc" system for the staff deployment survey
Xentec	Contract programmers for spectrum development work
Yale Data	Systems analyst to assist FSR with their development work Consultant to support in-house technical assurance coordinator
Arthur Young	A study into the information needs of senior management

Training Premiums

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to increase the level of ET premiums in 1989 or 1990.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no plans to increase the training premium part of trainees' allowances. However trainee allowances on employment training (ET) will increase from April 1989 when benefits are uprated.

Training (Health and Safety)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he will take following the judgement in the Cain case, to ensure that the establishment of training and enterprise councils will not diminish his final responsibility for the health and safety of both YTS and ET trainees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The contract between the Training Agency and training and enterprise councils (TECs) will require each TEC to meet the Government's requirements for the health, safety and welfare of trainees. The TECs will also be required to include conditions and acceptable standards relating to the health, safety and welfare of trainees in their contracts with providers of training. The Department has worked to ensure a high level of health and safety on all its programmes. The TECs will be required through their contract to continue this commitment.

Redundancy Payments

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money has been reimbursed to *(a)* community programme agents and sponsors; *(b)* new job training scheme providers; and *(c)* ET training managers and agents, for redundancy payments during the period from 1 September 1988, up to the most recently available date.

Mr. Nicholls: The amounts reimbursed for redundancy payments from 1 September 1988 up to and including February 1989, are as follows:

(a) — £1,683,495;
(b) — Nil; and
(c) — £37,250

Political Vetting

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *261*, what representations he has received concerning amendments to the terms of the Employment Protection Act 1975 in relation to the political vetting of employees.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has received five such representations in the last 12 months.

Youth Training

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of deaths and reportable injuries incurred by young workers on YTS schemes for each year of the scheme since inception; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The YTS accident statistics cannot be broken down into employed and non-employed status. Studies of YTS accidents by independent researchers have, however, shown that YTS trainees are not more at risk than young people of equivalent age in employment outside the programme.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people aged 16 and 17 years have been unable to obtain, or to take advantage of, an offer of a youth training scheme; and how many of these have been left without benefits.

Mr. Cope: The guarantee of an offer of a YTS place to all 16 and 17-year-olds not in full-time education or employment means that there is now no need for young people to be unemployed. I am satisfied that the Training Agency has more than sufficient YTS places available in all parts of the country for those who apply for one.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish forecasts of *(a)* the numbers unemployed and *(b)* unemployment rates for 1989-90 to 1991-92 for Scotland, Wales and by region in England.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available. The Department does not forecast future levels or rates of unemployment.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish forecasts of the numbers in employment for 1989-90 to 1991-92 for Scotland, Wales and by region in England.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available. The Department does not produce forecasts of employment, either in total or by region.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Colours

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department will provide an estimate of how many food colours at present in use in Britain are not listed in United Kingdom regulations.

Mr. Ryder: No food sold may contain any colouring matter other than a colouring matter permitted by the Colouring Matter in Food Regulations 1973, as amended. Enforcement of the regulations is a matter for local authorities. I am not aware of any reports of non-permitted colouring matter being used in food.

Set-aside

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total estimated cost of set-aside.

Mr. Ryder: Payments on land in the United Kingdom set aside in the current crop year will total about £11 million. The cost in future years will depend on the extent of further uptake of the scheme.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to increase the amount of set-aside for United Kingdom farmers.

Mr. Ryder: I shall be inviting further applications under the scheme later this spring. I have no plans to increase the levels of payment.

Hedgerows

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to introduce any legislation in the next parliamentary session which will provide statutory protection for hedgerows in England and Wales.

Mr. Ryder: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, *Official Report* 16 February, column 370, whether he has seen the research paper entitled, "Hedgerows: Still a cause for concern," published in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds conservation review, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement on the conclusions contained in that paper.

Mr. Ryder: I was pleased to receive the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds conservation review of 1988, and read with interest the article on hedgerows.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds surveys in north Hertfordshire and west Oxfordshire add to the number of recent surveys on hedgerow loss which have produced varying estimates. I am sure the hon. Member is aware that work is being carried out on improving survey methodologies and that my Department is contributing to this work. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds figures on hedgerow loss are of course related only to a small area, unrepresentative of the country as a whole.

Nevertheless we are concerned that hedgerows should be maintained in good order if they are to retain their value as wildlife habitat, as a landscape feature and as a stock-proof barrier. While this must be a matter for the individual farmers concerned, my Department encourages the maintenance of hedgerows in good condition. Through my agricultural development and advisory service advice is offered to farmers on hedgerow trimming and maintenance and on the time of year when cutting and trimming is best carried out for the benefit of wildlife.

Slaughtering

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Council relating to the slaughter of animals have been accepted by him.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Farm Animal Welfare council has published four reports relating to the slaughter of animals. These contained a total of 185 recommendations on slaughter of which 167 have been accepted, in whole or in part, for implementation by means of legislation, codes of practice, guidance to local authorities or research, as appropriate.

All but one of 45 recommendations in the report on the welfare of poultry at the time of slaughter (1982) were accepted. The report on the welfare of livestock (red meat animals) at the time of slaughter (1984) contained 117 recommendations of which only 13 were rejected in full. Fifteen of 17 recommendations in the report on the religious slaughter of livestock (1985) and four of six recommendations on slaughter in the report on the welfare of farmed deer (1985) have also been accepted.

Small Companies (Payments)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what advice has been given to him by the Intervention Board of the EEC on the payment on account of payments that may be due;

(2) whether, in the case of non-annex II products, he intends to accelerate payments to British producers under the terms of regulation 3665/87;

(3) whether he is satisfied that in the case of complex claims by small companies for payments under Commission regulation 3665/87 no delays are currently taking place;

(4) what representations he has received from smaller companies on delays in payments due under the terms of Commission regulation 3665/87.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Intervention Board is now in general paying claims for export refunds within 60 days of receipt of appropriate documentation. Exceptionally, more complex claims for non-annex II goods and claims for victualling supplies continue to be delayed. The payment position will be restored for the former in coming weeks and for the latter by the autumn. Payment on account would contravene the provision of EC regulations which require that the conformity of claims with the regulations should be verified prior to payment. This view has been confirmed by European Commission services. The board continues however to make compensation payments on all claims whose payment since 1 January 1988 has been unreasonably delayed under the compensation scheme announced to the House last July.

Exporters may apply under article 22 of Commission regulation (EEC) No. 3665/87 for advance payment once an export declaration has been accepted, and providing

that a security is lodged. In practice, the arrangement allows the provisional payment of premium rates of export refund in the same timescale as payments of standard rates. However, the Intervention Board is still required to check conformity with the relevant Community legislation before making the payment. The relative benefit of these different payment procedures is for commercial evaluation.

Lambs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is his Department's response to the practice of using staging posts to facilitate the transport of live exported lambs across Europe.

(2) if he has any plans to limit the length of time permitted for lambs to spend in transit immediately prior to slaughter;

(3) what representations he has received calling for the maximum travelling time for lambs prior to slaughter to be limited to 12 hours.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Over the years my Department has received a number of representations calling for maximum travelling times for live food animals to be limited to 12 hours. However EC legislation requires that animals in international transport, should be offered food and water at suitable intervals and should not be left more than 24 hours without being fed and watered. Staging posts exist to fulfil this requirement, and my Department seeks to ensure that they are used on long journeys. The Commission is expected to propose a new regulation on welfare in transit shortly, and meanwhile I have no plans to introduce new measures.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what steps he is taking to encourage the slaughter of lambs prior to export to the countries of the southern European Economic Community;

(2) what is his Department's response to the increasing practice of transporting live lambs considerable distances across Europe prior to slaughter;

(3) if he will raise at the next Council of Ministers the increasing practice of transporting live lambs across Europe prior to slaughter;

(4) whether his Department plans to take steps to encourage the slaughter of lambs for export as close to the farm of origin as possible.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Sheep and lambs have been exported to other member states of the Community for slaughter for many years. Provided that United Kingdom and EC welfare legislation is complied with, I see no need to interfere with this trade.

Research Funding

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those food and agricultural research programmes and institutes from which funding has been withdrawn during 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Ryder: Overall funding of agricultural, fisheries and food research and development by the Agriculture departments was reduced by £10 million in 1987-88, as part of the Government's policy to encourage industry to make a greater contribution towards the costs of R and D from which it benefits. Public support remained unchanged in 1988-89, and will be reduced by a further £5 million in 1989-90 under the Government's plans progressively to withdraw funding from near market research. A list of projects indicative of the work considered to be near market in the agriculture and food sectors was deposited in the Library of the House in November 1988. Funding of individual projects within the research programme is under continuous review, and in the natural course of events funding is withdrawn from particular projects as they reach a conclusion. The allocation of available funds for commissioned work to particular institutes is a matter for the Agriculture and Food Research council.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many scientists are currently employed by his Department reviewing pesticides currently in use which were in use prior to the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1986.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 23 March to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) at column *726*.

Deer

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is currently sponsoring into the incidence of tuberculosis in deer; and whether he has any programme for the development of vaccine or live-testing techniques; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: A survey is being carried out in selected areas of south-west England on culled wild deer to estimate the prevalence of tuberculosis in free living deer. In addition all wildlife material, including that from deer, that comes to the Ministry's notice, is examined for tuberculosis should there be any cause to suspect its presence. All reports of tuberculosis in farmed deer are investigated. More complete information on the prevalence of the disease will become available when it is made notifiable.

There is no programme for the development of a vaccine for deer as vaccination would adversely affect the interpretation of tuberculin tests. Work is being carried out at the central veterinary laboratory on the development of a blood test for tuberculosis in deer.

BST Product Licences

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which scientific or other committees in the United Kingdom or the European Economic Community will be responsible for assessing any application for a BST product licence.

Mr. Donald Thompson: In the United Kingdom such product licence applications are examined by the veterinary products committee established under section 4 of the Medicines Act. At Community level they are referred to the Committee on Veterinary Medicinal Products for an opinion, in accordance with directive 87/22/EEC on high technology medicinal products, before national licensing authorities reach any decision.

Strychnine

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department's guidance in the use of strychnine compounds includes reference to the use of such poisons for the control of wild rabbits.

Mr. Ryder: My Ministry's guidance makes it clear that strychnine may be used only for the control of moles. We take a very serious view of any abuse of strychnine to poison other creatures.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria have to be met by individuals wishing to obtain permission for the purchase of strychnine compounds for pest control purposes.

Mr. Ryder: Authorities to purchase strychnine are issued under the poisons rules only if the applicant demonstrates a need for strychnine for the destruction of moles, is a competent and suitable person, and does not occupy land on which moles are dealt with by a rabbit clearance society. The authority is limited to the amount of strychnine needed to deal with the infestation.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether strychnine alkaloid has any approved agricultural uses.

Mr. Ryder: Strychnine alkaloid is not approved for agricultural use under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The total amount spent by my Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, was £522,735. Contracts awarded in 1988 are as follows:

Company	*Subject*
Management consultancy contracts awarded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1988	
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells	Survey on fees to local veterinary inspectors
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells	Relocation of work study
Agro—Economic Services Ltd.	Study of impact of single market on agricultural research and development priorities
Computer consultancy contracts awarded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1988	
Kerridge Computer Company Ltd.	Transfer of work to new computer
Wootton Jeffreys plc	Transfer of project control system
Learmouth and Burchett Management Systems Touche Ross Management Consultants Deloitte, Haskins and Sells	Farm survey system full study
Asterisk Computer Systems Ltd. Quanta Learning Systems Pergammon Infotech Godfrey Durham	Support to regional administrative data flow pilot project
Logica UK Ltd.	Support to national food survey project
Asterisk Computer Systems	System development for Harpenden laboratory
Asterisk Computer Systems	System development for legal branch
Spicer and Oppenheim	Financial system study for National Institute of Agricultural Botany, Cambridge
Oracle UK Keith London Associates	Transfer of work to new computer
PA Consulting Services Ltd.	Agricultural Development and Advisory Service IT sub-strategy study Fisheries sub-strategy study
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells	Cost awareness information system development
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells Nolan Norton and Co. Software AG of UK	Technical consultancies
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells	IT strategy review

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls exist to ensure that live cattle imported into the United Kingdom are free from bovine tuberculosis.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Under European Community rules cattle intended for breeding or production imported from other member states must originate from officially tuberculosis-free herds and they must be tested for bovine tuberculosis with negative results in the 30 days before export. Additionally, such cattle imported from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland must be tested again, with negative results, 60 days after import. Cattle intended for slaughter imported from other member states must either originate from officially tuberculosis-free herds or be tested for bovine tuberculosis with negative results in the 30 days before export.

Cattle imported from third countries are required to originate from premises which have been free from bovine tuberculosis for the previous 12 months and to be tested for bovine tuberculosis with negative results during a period of at least 30 days isolation on their premises of origin. Cattle from Canada are subject to an additional test during pre-export quarantine.

Live Cattle Imports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the numbers of live cattle imported from Ireland for each of the last seven years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The numbers of cattle imported into the United Kingdom from the Republic of Ireland were as follows:

Head of cattle

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Breeding cattle	489	614	342	229	413	413	2,306
Fats and stores	133,607	187,227	213,253	217,705	231,087	150,573	174,887
Calves	2,394	2,207	1,627	2,625	429	109	510
TOTAL	136,490	190,048	215,222	220,559	231,929	151,095	177,703

Porcine Somatotropin

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has concerning trials of porcine somatotropin.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No field trials of porcine somatotropin are currently authorised in the United Kingdom.

Eggs

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is proposing to take to ensure that imported eggs meet the production standards he has set for British eggs.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Egg imports normally come from other EC member states and for both home produced and imported eggs the EC quality requirements are enforced by the agricultural departments and trading standards officers. Using their powers under the Imported Food Regulations 1984 some port health authorities have tested imported eggs for salmonella recently. A more systematic monitoring of imported eggs for salmonella is being set up in consultation with the port health authorities and the public health laboratory service.

Salmonella should be tackled on an EC-wide basis. Preliminary discussions have already taken place in Brussels on a Commission proposal to deal with a range of zoonoses including salmonella.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the number of egg packers receiving money under the egg industry scheme of *(a)* over £200,000, *(b)* £100 to £200,000, *(c)* £75 to £100,000 and *(d)* £50 to £75,000 and less than £50,000.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* I am unable to give these details in the form requested as this would lead to the disclosure of information that could be attributed to particular packers. But six egg packers in the United Kingdom received total payments of £50,000 or more; and 657 egg packers received smaller sums.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has made any assessment of the likely hazard to human health from the consumption of animal production derived from cattle incubating bovine spongiform encephalopathy prior to the onset of clinical signs of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Southwood report concludes that it is most unlikely that bovine spongiform encephalopathy will have any implications for human health.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he has any estimate of the likely future incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy;

(2) what evidence he has of the likely incidence of cattle incubation of bovine spongiform encephalopathy but not showing clinical signs.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 13 March at column *78*.

Quarantine

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce revised regulations for animal quarantine premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Quarantine premises must meet prescribed standards and be aproved by my Department as

providing appropriate safeguards against the introduction of animal diseases. My Department will shortly be writing to the operators of quarantine kennels about revised conditions for their operation.

Potatoes

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the average price of potatoes per kilo to the domestic consumer in each European Community country in each of the past five years.

Mr. Ryder: I regret that the information requested is not readily available.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions for breaches of the Slaughterhouse Act 1974 there have been in *(a)* 1987 and *(b)* 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Enforcement of the Slaughterhouses Act 1974 is the responsibility of local authorities. Information on the number of prosecutions is not collected centrally.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he is proposing to improve the inspection of slaughterhouses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Local authorities are responsible for enforcing the legislation and members of the state veterinary service visit abattoirs to monitor standards and give advice.

The Government propose to make it a statutory requirement for local authorities to designate an official to be formally responsible for the supervision and enforcement of welfare requirements in slaughterhouses.

Slaughterhouse Workers

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consider outlawing the piece rate method of paying slaughterhouse workers.

Mr. Donald Thompson: No. It is the responsibility of all involved to ensure that welfare and hygiene requirements are observed irrespective of the methods of payment to workers in abattoirs.

Livestock (Slaughter)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research is being carried out into the advantages of high voltage stun and kill systems as recommended by the Farm Animal Welfare Council's 1984 report on the welfare of livestock at the time of slaughter.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The research which the Farm Animal Welfare Council recommended was commissioned by my Department. This has shown that the high current required to induce cardiac arrest in sheep and pigs will always instantaneously render the animals insensible to pain. Work into other aspects of high voltage stunning is continuing.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to introduce the legislation and codes referred to in the Government response to the Farm Animal Welfare Council's 1984 report on the welfare of livestock animals at the time of slaughter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I expect to issue proposals for new regulations on the welfare of all animals at slaughter shortly. The codes of practice will be issued under new enabling powers which is it is proposed to take in primary legislation as soon as parliamentary time permits.

Sole

Mr. Anthony Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total volume of imported sole from Holland landed in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The total tonnage of fresh, chilled and frozen sole imported from the Netherlands into the United Kingdom was as follows:

Year	*Tonnes*
1986	667
1987	589
1988	[1]613

[1] Provisional.
Source: Customs and Excise Overseas Trade Statistics.

Imports are unrestricted, and levels reflect market supply and demand.

Eggs

Mr. Crowther: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column 51, he will ensure that all eggs are marked so as to show whether they are produced in a battery, free range or otherwise.

Mr. Donald Thompson: EC regulations on marketing standards for eggs do not permit the method of production to be stamped on the egg although, as I indicated in my previous answer, eggs produced under alternative systems to the battery may be marketed in packs bearing the appropriate designation of the production system.

Consumer interests have indicated that they would not welcome a change in the legislation to require the marking of eggs.

Bovine Tuberculosis (Badgers)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what has been the annual cost of the bovine tuberculosis eradication scheme for each of the last seven years;

(2) when he intends to review the progress of the bovine tuberculosis eradication scheme; what is his assessment of the success of the scheme to date; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what research his Department is currently funding into the development of a vaccine against bovine tuberculosis in badgers;

(4) when he proposes to authorise field trials for vaccine against bovine tuberculosis in badgers;

(5) how many badgers were removed in 1988, by parish; and how many were subsequently proved to be tuberculoid in those cases where prior approval of the consultative panel was required;

(6) if he will publish a table showing for each parish in 1988 the number of badgers taken by his Department under his badger control strategy and the number subsequently shown by post-mortem examination to be tuberculoid;

(7) what proportion of those badgers killed in the bovine tuberculosis eradication scheme have subsequently been proven to be infected with tuberculosis;

(8) how many badgers have been killed in the bovine tuberculosis eradication scheme over each of the last seven years;

(9) what information he has on the proportion of badgers infected with tuberculosis that are infective to cattle and other badgers;

(10) what progress his Department is making on the live testing of badgers for tuberculosis; and when he expects the results of field trials to be available;

(11) what is the proportion of cattle slaughtered as suspected cases of bovine tuberculosis which are subsequently discovered not to be suffering from the disease; and what is the number of cattle slaughtered as suspected cases of bovine tuberculosis in each of the last seven years;

(12) what is the total disbursed in each of the last seven years as compensation to farmers whose cattle have been slaughtered as suspected cases of bovine tuberculosis;

(13) whether he intends commissioning a formal review of the badger control element of his bovine tuberculosis eradication programme;

(14) if he willlist the members of his badger panel and indicate for each member his qualification and expertise;

(15) whether he has made any assessment of the effectiveness of the badger including element of his bovine tuberculosis eradication programme;

(16) what evaluation he has made of the cost-effectiveness of the development and possible applications of live-testing techniques for bovine tuberculosis in badgers;

(17) whether he is currently considering any alternatives to budger culling in his programme to eradicate bovine tuberculosis in badger areas.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The annual cost of the bovine tuberculosis eradication scheme (which relates to action taken in respect of tuberculosis in cattle, badgers and latterly deer), including compensation for cattle, and the number of cattle and badgers killed under it during the last seven years are set out in the table.

	Total Cost of the Scheme (£ million)	*Of which Compensation £*	*Cattle*	*Badgers*
1982	n/a	250,782	614	1,005
1983	n/a	295,469	677	1,239
1984	6·3	284,613	746	1,337
1985	7·6	337,806	863	1,115
1986	7·1	310,399	645	782
1987	6·7	525,447	1,173	711
1988	6·5	368,158	782	774

All animals in which disease is confirmed must be considered as potentially infective to other cattle and badgers. Of the cattle slaughtered in 1988, disease was confirmed by laboratory examination in 36 per cent. Disease was confirmed in 29 per cent. of the badgers taken in the same year. It cannot be assumed, in the case of either cattle or badgers, that the remainder were unaffected.

Details, by parish, of the number of badgers killed in 1988 and the number in which tuberculosis was confirmed are given in the table.

County and parish	*Number taken*	*Number positive*
TYPE I		
Avon		
Balhearston	4	0
Cold Ashton	23	1
Hawkesbury	25	18
Marshfield	17	8
St. Catherine	2	1
Yate	36	9
Cornwall		
Feock	8	5
Lanlivery	17	6
Linkinhorne	31	3
Mabe	9	2
St. Cleer	2	0
St. Ive	1	0
St. Teath	4	2
Sancreed	1	0
South Hill	1	1
Week St. Mary	5	0
Devon		
Bradworthy	10	2
Chagford	35	11
Hartland	4	1
Holne	24	6
Holsworthy Hamlets	17	3
Lustleigh	13	0
Milton Damorel	22	0
North Bovey	31	7
Sutcombe	1	1
Widecombe in the Moor	9	3
Woolfordisworthy near Bideford	11	2
Dorset		
Beaminster	4	1
Burleston	2	1
Dewlish	4	1
Puddletown	7	2
Stoke Abbott	13	2
Gloucester		
Boxwell with Leighterton	7	3
Brockworth	6	4
Edgeworth	56	28
Long Newnton	28	8
Newent	6	0
Owlpen	7	2
Painswick	2	0
Pauntley	13	5
Prestbury	37	28

County and parish	Number taken	Number positive
Shipton Moyne	28	5
Stroud	4	0
Tetbury Upton	3	2
Uley	24	9
Somerset		
Cheddar	6	0
Rodney Stoke	15	1
Westbury	2	0
Wiltshire		
Luckington	1	0
Sherston	3	0
St. Paul Malmesbury Without	1	0
TYPE II		
Cornwall		
Newquay	7	0
Menheniot	1	0
St. Martin	13	0
Devon		
Hollacombe	3	0
Thornbury	5	0
Dartmoor Forest*	8	0
Avon		
Swainswick*	3	1
Dorset		
Milton Abbas	45	8
Netherbury	2	0
Gloucester		
Southrop	1	0
Upton St. Leonards*	10	7
Cheltenham Borough*	5	0
Kingswood*	5	1
Wiltshire		
Christian Malford	1	0
Dyfed		
Castlebythe	6	0
Little Newcastle	15	0
Puncheston	2	0

* Formed part of Type I operations where adjoining land was involved.

Type I operations are those which are approved departmentally and take place within badger problem areas. These are defined as parishes in which there has been at least one cattle breakdown of apparent badger origin within the previous six years. Type II operations take place in areas outside badger problem areas and require the agreement of the badger panel.

The current membership of the panel is as follows:

Name	
Mr. M. T. Thomasin-Foster	Chairman (Vice-Chairman of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group)
	Representing:
Mr. R. J. Badcock	National Farmers' Union
Lady Bolitho	County Landowners' Association
Mr. C. P. Booty	Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Mr. R. Ewbank	Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
Dr. D. Jefferies	Nature Conservancy Council
Professor H. E. M. Kay	Royal Society for Nature Conservation
Dr. D. W. MacDonald	Fauna and Flora Preservation Society
Dr. A. McDiarmid	Expert on Diseasesin Wildlife
Mr. R. M. Meyer	National Federation of Badger Groups
Dr. E. Neal	Eminent Authorityon Badgers
Mr. R. Neville	TGWU Agricultural and Allied Workers National Trade Group
Dr. J. L. Stanford	Microbiologist, Middlesex Hospital
Mr. J. Sterry	British Veterinary Association
Mr. E. R. Thomas	Dairy Farmer, Carmarthen
Mr. H. V. Thompson	Mammal Society

Possible alternative methods of badger control are being investigated. Research work to develop a reliable vaccine has been carried out at the Middlesex hospital. Further work will be necessary before field trials to determine the efficacy of such a vaccine can commence. Work is also under way on the development of a test in the live animal. If such a test can be developed it should enable control operations to be targeted more effectively.

The badger panel is responsible for keeping under review the evidence relating to bovine tuberculosis in badgers. This is an ongoing process designed to supplement the formal reviews undertaken by Lord Zuckerman and Professor Dunnet. In his 1986 report, Professor Dunnet recommended that the badger strategy should be considered either three or five years after its adoption if there was evidence of a significant increase in herd breakdowns. It is intended to follow this recommendation in considering future policy.

The scheme has resulted in a significant reduction in the incidence of disease in cattle. Many areas of the country are now virtually free from the disease, although it is proving more difficult in the south-west because of infection in the local badger population.

Sheep Dip

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what grants are available for farmers to re-site their sheep-dipping facilities away from the edge of water courses.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Under the farm and conservation grant scheme grant is not available for farm buildings and associated animal husbandry facilities, including those intended for use in the gathering and treatment of livestock. Thus, for example, sheep dips and associated gathering pens are not eligible for grant aid. Where a farmer has an existing plan approved under one of the earlier grant schemes, this may contain sheep

dipping facilities. In these circumstances grant is still payable. The present capital grant scheme continues to aid facilities for the safe disposal of spent sheepdip.

Abattoirs (Statistics)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number and type of animals which were processed in the United Kingdom in *(a)* European Community approved abattoirs and *(b)* non-European Community approved abattoirs for each of the last eight years.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 20 March 1989]:* Figures are available only for the last four years and are based on abattoirs with EC export approval as at the end of 1988. Latest estimates are:

(Million head)

	Adult Cattle and Calves		*Sheep*		*Pigs*		*Total*	
	EC Export Approved	*Non EC Export Approved*	*EC Export Approved*	*Non EC Export Approved*	*EC Export Approved*	*Non EC Export Approved*	*EC Export Approved*	*Non EC Export Approved*
1985	2·4	1·9	6·7	9·2	5·4	9·9	14·5	21·0
1986	2·1	1·8	6·6	8·9	5·7	9·9	14·4	20·6
1987[1]	2·2	1·9	7·1	8·7	5·9	10·0	15·2	20·6
1988	1·8	1·6	8·2	8·9	6·2	9·5	16·2	20·0

Figures of the numbers of horses and goats slaughtered at abattoirs are not collected.
[1] 53 weeks.

Meat Statistics

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much meat was consumed in the United Kingdom from the non-European Community approved abattoirs in 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 20 March 1989]:* It is provisionally estimated that just over 1·2 million tonnes of carcase meat (cattle, sheep, pigs) was produced in non-EC export-approved abattoirs in the United Kingdom in 1988. Most of this will have been consumed or processed in the United Kingdom.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much meat from European Community approved abattoirs in the United Kingdom was *(a)* exported and *(b)* consumed in the United Kingdom in 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 20 March 1989]:* It is provisionally estimated that just over 1·1 million tonnes of carcase meat (cattle, pigs and sheep) was produced in EC export-approved abattoirs in the United Kingdom in 1988. Of this about 23 per cent. will have been exported and 3½ per cent. sold into intervention. The remainder will have been sold for consumption or processing in the United Kingdom.

PRIME MINISTER

Labour Statistics

Q40. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the current level of employment.

Q46. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the current level of employment.

Q50. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the current level of employment.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations about the level of employment. The workforce in employment has been on a rising trend for more than five years and now stands at the highest level ever seen at 25,807,000.

President Gorbachev

Q57. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the visit of President Gorbachev.

Q140. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the visit of President Gorbachev.

Q152. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the visit of President Gorbachev.

The Prime Minister: I have received representations about a wide range of issues, in particular human rights in the Soviet Union. I shall of course be taking up this question with Mr. Gorbachev.

NATO

Q102. **Mr. Neil Thorne:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the United Kingdom relationship with its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Q126. **Mr. Iain Mills:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the United Kingdom relationship with its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Q142. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the United Kingdom relationship with its allies in NATO.

The Prime Minister: I have not received any recent representations, although I am regularly involved in a range of matters regarding the United Kingdom's relationship with the Allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Today, of course, marks the 40th anniversary of NATO's foundation. During that time, the Alliance has been uniquely successful in preserving peace in Europe and in providing the basis for the prosperity and stability that we all enjoy.

Rain Forests

Q105. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the

arrangements known as debt-for-nature swap, in relation to helping Governments with substantial areas of rain forest at risk.

The Prime Minister: We welcome debt for nature swaps agreed voluntarily between commercial banks and debtors. Arrangements whereby conservation organisations can benefit from the secondary market discount on commercial bank debt can provide valuable additional resources for the environment. But their role is likely to remain limited.

Kington Magna

Q138. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Kington Magna.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Willoughby

Q143. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Willoughby near Ruby.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Select Committee Reports

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what is the average length of time it has taken each Government Department respectively, to reply to Select Committee reports; what is the shortest time taken to respond; and what is the longest, since May 1979.

The Prime Minister: On the basis of material readily available, the departmental estimates of information requested are as follows:

Department	*Time in days*		
	Average	*Shortest*	*Longest*
Agriculture	94	77	120
Defence	98	23	323
Education	153	15	450
Employment	97	5	209
Energy	65	11	147
Environment	139	12	397
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (including ODA)	87	11	272
Health and Social Security[1]	148	14	365
Home Office	140	26	365
Office of the Minister for the Civil Service	82	63	105
Scottish Office	128	33	392
Trade and Industry	78	14	224
Transport	155	31	351
Treasury	69	28	232
Welsh Office	156	36	360

[1] Became two separate departments in July 1988.

Homelessness

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister whether she intends to take any initiatives to reduce the level of homelessness amongst young people under 21 years of age.

The Prime Minister: The Government are currently reviewing the homelessness legislation. It is too early to comment on any specific initiatives which may follow.

Economy (Press Notice)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give fixed capital expenditure of the economy at current and 1985 prices for division 0 to 9, both in total and individually for each year 1986, 1987 and 1988 consistent with the figures published by the CSO in the 17 March 1989 press notice (89) 28, "Gross Domestic Product Fourth Quarter and Year 1988".

The Prime Minister: The latest estimates of fixed capital expenditure by the industries classified to divisions 0 to 9 are given in total in the table. An industrial analysis of these figures is not yet available. Some industrial detail will be published, as usual, in the regular "National Income and Expenditure" article in the CSO's *Economic Trends* for April 1989.

Gross domestic fixed capital formation by all industries in divisions 0 to 9, (excluding dwellings and net purchases of land and existing buildings and associated transfer costs).

£ million

	1986	*1987*	*1988*
Current prices	47,258	53,834	62,494
Constant 1985 prices	45,416	49,600	55,880

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give a source, date and reference specifying to which set of earlier figures the upward adjustments given on page 7 of the CSO press notice of 17 March 1989 (89) 28 "Gross Domestic Product Fourth Quarter and Year 1988" refer.

The Prime Minister: The adjustments attach to the latest estimates of gross domestic fixed capital formation derived from CSO's quarterly data collection system, not to previously published estimates. They are designed to anticipate better the final figures when full information is available from annual inquiries.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Prime Minister when she anticipates the full information of a fixed investment and its sectoral and industrial composition mentioned on page 7 of the LSO press notice of 17 March 1989 will be available.

The Prime Minister: More detailed estimates than those currently available will be published in "UK National Accounts" 1989 edition in September. Estimates for 1988 will as usual still be provisional at that stage. Such additional information as is available before then will be incorporated in the figures in the regular quarterly articles on "national income and expenditure" in the CSO's *Economic Trends*, April and July 1989 issues.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total amount spent by the Cabinet Office in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if she will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Cabinet Office in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

The Prime Minister: The following is the information.

Firm	*Assignment*
Training Development Approaches Ltd.	Design of a manual in support of the young people programme
Industrial Training Service Ltd.	Production of a guide on conducting training needs analyses
Erwin Scheider	Feasibility study for a computerised management information system
WRM Ltd.	Training information and communications study
Arthur Young Management Consultants	Evaluation of future information technology requirements
PA Personnel Services	Analysis of executive officer and fast stream recruitments
Questel Qualitative Studies Ltd.[1]	Audit of recruitment publicity
Anne Hughes Hallett[1]	Research into career attitudes
University of London Institute of Education	Analysis of recruitment competition data
Human Assets Ltd.	Study of information officers recruitment procedures
Equalities Associates	Guidelines for trainers on equal opportunities issues
Fact Index Ltd.	Enhancements to computer network system
Ashbridge Management College	Study of Women's National Commission
Central Legal Systems Ltd.[1]; Yale Data Computer Consultants[1]	User requirement and business case for statute law database

[1] Costs for these studies were shared with other Government Departments.

Security

Mr. Ken Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister, if she will make a statement on the progress in implementing each of the recommendations contained in the statement on the recommendations of the Security Commission; Cmnd. 8540, May 1982.

The Prime Minister: All the recommendations have been implemented.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister, if she will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from her to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 13 February about Mr. Colin Wallace and related matters.

The Prime Minister: No. It is not my usual practice to publish exchanges of this kind.

Security Vetting (Indecency)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy that a conviction for indecency shall be grounds for refusing vetting clearance.

The Prime Minister: Each case is considered on its merits.

Life Sentences

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister what is the average length of a life sentence served in *(a)* England and *(b)* Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: The average time served under sentence in prison service establishments in England and Wales by those first released on licence from a life sentence in the three years 1985 to 1987 was about 10¾ years. A comparable figure for Northern Ireland is not readily available. The average time spent in custody, including on remand, by those first released from prison service establishments in Northern Ireland from a life sentence in the same three years was just over 11 years. These average figures do not take account of the longest periods being served by some of those given life sentences following abolition of capital punishment who have not yet been released.

Engagements

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister, if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 4 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

TRANSPORT

Cambridge-King's Lynn Line

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the basis and calculations used to determine the discounted rate of return on the £20 million expenditure in the electrification of the Cambridge-King's Lynn railway line.

Mr. Portillo: The scheme was appraised in the normal way, as described in paragraphs 61 and 62 of the Department of Transport's memorandum to the Select Committee on Transport's examination of the financing of rail services. The board evaluated many options including bus substitution, a DMU shuttle service between Cambridge and King's Lynn, and full electrification. The additional cost of electrification was shown to earn a financial return, at a 7 per cent. discount rate, when compared with all other options, and the project was approved on that basis.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The total amount spent by the Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, was £1·89 million.

Comprehensive records of all contracts with consultancy firms are not at present held centrally. It would be

disproportionately expensive to collect all the information required. The following list identifies those management and computing consultancies which began in 1988 and are valued at 10,000 or more.

Firm	*Subject of Assignment*
AIMS	Structured systems analysis design and methodology
B. T. Marketing Services	Sale of vehicle registration marks
CACI	Data administrator
CACI	Land/property management
CACI	NIS Stage 1+ development
CCTA	H & T security review
Computer Search & Selection	Fishing vessels system developments
Coopers & Lybrand	Advice on the Department's IT strategy
Coopers & Lybrand	Executive Agency (DVL)
D. E. Barnard Systems	QA/technical review
Dunsmore Data & Info	NIS works data site application
EASAMS	NIS works data application
EASAMS	NIS database administration
FORVUS	Advice to statistics on access to DVLC data
Halcrow Fox Association	QUADRO development
Howard Humphries	Bridges database merge
KPMG	NIS design configuration
KPMG	RMMS support/testing
Logsys	RCPI database
Logsys	Highways inquiries system
Logsys	Severn bridge tolls database
Mott Hay & Anderson	HRM enhancement/maintenance
Mott Hay & Anderson	STRAND/GRIDS maintenance
Mott Hay & Anderson	ARCADY/PICADY maintanence
MVA Systematica	COBA10 development
MVA Systematica	CIDEL maintenance
MVA Systematica	OSCADY maintenance
Peat Marwick McLintock	Design of IFCOS accounting system
Peat Marwick McLintock	Vehicle inspectorate accounting system—project control
Perth Crest	Winter fleet stock control
Price Waterhouse	H & T IT strategy development
RTI	INGRES database review
SCICON	Enhancement to chemical and oil spill system
S. G. Bisson	Geotechnical database
S. G. Bisson	NaRIS enhancement
S. G. Bisson	Consultants' performance database
SIA	NISL CHART interface Stage II
Software AG	Drivers 90's harmonisation project
Transport Planning Association	ROADWAY maintenance
Transport Planning Association	ROADWAY enhancement
W. S. Atkins	SCRIM project definition
Wootton Jeffreys	URECA enhancement
Wootton Jeffreys	COBA/QUADRO maintenance

Dangerous Loads

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce regulations to provide training for drivers of motor vehicles carrying dangerous, inflammable and explosive substances, and compulsory notices of the contents of motor vehicles listing the contents with criminal sanctions for failure to comply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Dangerous Substances (Conveyance by Road in Road Tankers and Tank Containers) Regulations 1981 and the Road Traffic (Carriage of Dangerous Substances in Packages etc.) Regulations 1986 require drivers to be trained so that they understand both the nature of the dangers to which the substance(s) being carried may give rise and any emergency action which should be taken as well as their duties under the regulations.

The new Carriage of Explosives by Road Regulations will contain a similar provision.

The national (dangerous substances) driver training scheme, sponsored by industry, provides a network of training centres throughout the United Kingdom which offer courses for drivers on different types of dangerous loads. This system works well.

The road tanker regulations require tank vehicles to display placards indicating by means of known code numbers the substances carried and the appropriate emergency response action. Vehicles carrying more than 500kg of packaged dangerous goods must display the blank orange plate to alert the emergency services, but listing such dangerous goods would not be practicable. As I told the House on 23 March, the new carriage of explosives regulations will require the display of the orange plate, as well as descriptive placards for the most dangerous explosives.

Failure to comply with any United Kingdom legislation in this field is an offence. It is a matter for the courts to decide upon the level of appropriate fines, which can be unlimited upon indictment.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to prohibit the transportation of detonators, fuses and explosives together; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The new regulations to be laid before the House, governing the carriage of explosives by road, are based on the internationally recognised UN system of classification of danger in transport. So are the other United Kingdom road regulations in this field.

Under the UN system, explosives are assigned to compatibility groups by either the Health and Safety Executive or the Ministry of Defence. This allocation into groups depends upon, for example, the sensitivity of the explosive, whether or not it contains its own means of ignition and whether or not it has any independent safety feature.

During drafting of the new regulations careful consideration was given to the question of ensuring safety when mixed loads are carried on the same vehicle. The requirement will be that where detonators, fuses and other explosives are carried together, effective measures must be taken to ensure that such carriage is as safe as if only one type of explosive were being carried.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new steps he is taking to ensure that in future local fire chiefs receive advance warning of explosive or dangerous loads travelling through an area by road or rail.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It would not be practicable for fire or police services to be notified prior to every movement of a dangerous substance.

The new Carriage of Explosives by Road Regulations, which should be laid before the House next week, will contain a requirement for the route to be followed to be agreed with the relevant chief officers of police when a large load of the most dangerous types of explosive is being carried.

Cleaning (Stoke-on-Trent)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much extra money will be paid to highway authorities in Stoke-on-Trent, north; and which sites will be covered under his clean-up.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A £1 million litter clearing campaign on motorways and trunk roads was launched by the Department on 17 March. The A500 and A34/A50 trunk roads in Stoke-on-Trent, north will be cleaned during the next few weeks by Staffordshire county council, acting as our agent. Detailed costs are not available.

Mrs. Edwina Crantham (Heavy Goods Licence)

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he intends to reissue a heavy goods vehicle licence to replace licence 14/N/A 008 618 for Mrs. Edwina Crantham;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Metropolitan traffic commissioners as to when they intend to replace heavy goods vehicle licence No. 14/N/A 008 618, class 3 and 3A for Mrs. Edwina Crantham.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The licence was renewed for three years on 14 March 1989.

Headcorn Aerodrome

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made in deciding whether to designate Headcorn aerodrome for consultative purposes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is considering the designation of several new aerodromes including Headcorn for consultation purposes. He hopes to make an order shortly.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many motor vehicles involved in fatal accidents during 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 were driven by disqualified drivers;

(2) how many motor vehicles involved in fatal accidents during 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 have been stolen or taken illegally without the owner's consent;

(3) how many motor vehicles involved in fatal accidents during 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 were driven by uninsured drivers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information requested is not collected on the STATS19 road accident report form.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motor vehicles involved in fatal accidents in 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 were driven by drivers who were under legal age to drive on public roads or who were otherwise driving without legal authority.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In fatal road accidents in 1985 there were 42 motor vehicles whose driver or rider was under the legal age to drive that vehicle; in 1986 there were 38 such vehicles and in 1987 there were 40. Figures for 1988 are not yet available.

It is not possible to obtain figures for those drivers who were otherwise driving without legal authority.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Bottles and Papers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Leader of the House what plans he has to stage collection points for bottles and papers in the House.

Mr. Wakeham: Arrangements already exist in the Palace of Westminster for the collection of bottles and papers. The Property Services Agency has commissioned a study into the effective collection and disposal of all types of waste and have had discussions with the relevant departments of both Houses. Their recommendations will be considered in due course by the relevant sub-committee of the Services Committee.

Recycled Paper

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Leader of the House what percentage of paper used in the House of Commons is recycled paper.

Mr. Wakeham: It is not possible to identify this percentage.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to use recycled paper in the House of Commons.

Mr. Wakeham: Her Majesty's Stationery Office already supplies the House with buff envelopes, ruled writing paper, file covers, note books, index books, lavatory paper and waste paper sacks, which all contain at least 50 per cent. recycled material. The Accommodation and

Administration Sub-Committee has instructed the House authorities and HMSO to keep it informed of any significant developments which will enable the use of recycled paper to be extended.

Division Bells

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council what information he has as to how many authorisations have been granted for the installation of Division bells in research assistants' private flats and homes.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 23 March at column *696*.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Selective Investment Brokers Limited

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Attorney-General what advice regarding further inquiries into the affairs of Selective Investment Brokers Limited was recommended by the Wiltshire police to the Director of Public Prosecutions in their report; and what action was taken.

The Attorney-General: In May 1987 the Wiltshire constabulary submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions a report regarding their inquiries into the affairs of Selective Investment Brokers Limited. That report did not disclose sufficient evidence to justify the institution of criminal proceedings. Subsequently, further evidence became available which has resulted in Mr. Anthony Wheeler, the sole director of Selective Investment Brokers Limited, being charged with theft. Investigations into the matter are continuing.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total amount spent by the Land Registry in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts excluding hardware and software purchases.

The Attorney-General: The total amount spent by the Land Registry in 1988 on management consultancy contracts was £1,372 and on computer consultancy contracts £13,080, excluding hardware and software purchases.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Land Registry in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

The Attorney-General: Management and computer consultancy contracts were awarded by the Land Registry in 1988 as follows:

(i) *Management Consultancy*

Roland Long Limited:

A survey designed to improve staff and management communication at one district land registry.

(ii) *Computer Consultancy*

IBM (UK) Limited:

A system evaluation to investigate and improve the use of the central processing unit of the department's main computer.

Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency:

A Departmental Support Agreement to provide continuing technical advice, support and an information technology procurement service.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases.

The Attorney-General: Nil.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

The Attorney-General: No management or computer consultancy contract was awarded by the Law Officers' Department in 1988.

Mr. Martin Foran

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will prosecute for assaulting Martin Foran the four prison officers from Walton prison against whom £750 damages were awarded in favour of Mr. Foran at Newport county court.

The Attorney-General: No. Such proceedings would not be in conformity with the code for Crown prosecutors. I add, in the interests of accuracy, that in the civil proceedings to which the hon. Member refers the action was stayed upon terms that £750 be paid to the plaintiff, with costs. No admission of liability was made.

Middlesex Guildhall Collection

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Attorney-General what items from the Middlesex Guildhall collection will be on display in time for the official opening of the refurbished court house on 5 April; and what financial contribution has been made to the London residuary body in respect of the display of such items.

The Attorney-General: The items from the Middlesex Guildhall collection which will be on display for the official opening of the refurbished court house on 5 April are:

Gilt framed oil painting of Sir Montague Sharpe by G. Spencer Watson.

Gilt framed oil painting of Sir Filfred Craig by Harold Knight.

Gilt framed oil painting of Sir Ralph Littler by Beatrice Offor.

Gilt framed oil painting of Thomas Forster by T. C. Dugdale.

Gilt framed oil painting of the Duke of Bedford by John Collier.

Gilt framed oil painting of Francis Const by unknown artist.

Gilt framed oil painting of Sir Baptist Hikes attributed to Paul Van Somer.

Three framed documents commemorating the first authorisation by the British Parliament of the Establishment of Maritime Courts by the Allied and Associated Foreign Powers in the United Kingdom during the Second World War.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has agreed to meet the costs of removing these items from the county hall to Middlesex Guildhall, the hanging of the items in the Middlesex Guildhall and the cost of insuring the items against loss or damage by fire and theft.

HEALTH

Occupational Therapists

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many additional occupational therapists are required by the south east Thames regional health authority; and what steps are being taken to diminish the shortage.

Mr. Freeman: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give a breakdown of figures within the Trent regional health authority for the latest year that he has figures for food poisoning according to numbers and types of cases associated with *(a)* fish, *(b)* meat, *(c)* vegetables, *(d)* eggs and *(e)* other foods; and if he will give figures for each district health authority.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The information is not available centrally in precisely the form requested.

The table gives the total number of notifications of food poisoning for Trent regional health authority by county for 1987, the latest year for which figures are available. No information is available centrally on the cause of infection.

	Number
Lincolnshire	227
Leicestershire	327
Nottinghamshire	621
Derbyshire	400
South Yorkshire	674
Total Trent RHA	2,249

Residential Homes

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registrations have been cancelled under the provisions of section 30 of the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each year since its implementation.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registrations by region have been *(a)* made and *(b)* cancelled under the provision of section 30 of the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each year since its implementation.

Mr. Mellor: The number of cancelled registrations notified to the Department in respect of each region under the provisions of section 30 of the Registered Homes Act 1984 since it came into operation on 1 January 1985 is as follows.

Region	*Year*	*Number*
Trent regional health authority	1985	1
South East Thames regional health authority	1986	1
Wessex regional health authority South East Thames regional health authority	1987	2
Northern regional health authority Yorkshire regional health authority South West Thames regional health authority	1988	3

Registration is a function of district health authorities and local authorities. The number of new reigstrations is not collected centrally.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many persons have had applications for registration rejected under the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each year since its implementation;

(2) how many unregistered residential homes have been discovered by registering authorities under the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each year since its implementation;

(3) how many persons, on a full-time equivalent basis, are employed in inspection of residential homes under the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each of the registration authorities.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many persons aged 65 yearsand over were in *(a)* local authority, *(b)* voluntary and *(c)* private residential homes in the latest year for which statistics are available;

(2) what was the total cost of maintaining persons aged 65 yearsand over in residential homes run by local authorities in the lates year for which statistics are available; and what was the average cost per person;

(3) what was the total cost to local authorities of maintaining persons aged 65 years and over in private residential homes in the latest year for which statistics are available; and what was the average cost per person.

Mr. Mellor: Information on the number of persons aged 65 years and over in homes for the elderly and younger physically handicapped is published in "Residential Accommodation for Elderly and Younger Physically Handicapped People: All Residents in Local Authority, Voluntary and Private Homes Year Ending 31 March 1986" a copy of which is available in the Library. Provisional information as at 31 March 1987 is given in the table, which also shows the available information about local authorities' gross and net expenditure on residential care homes for elderly and younger physically handicapped people for the financial year 1986-87.

Type of home	*Number of residents as at 31 March 1987 (provisional)*				*Costs to LAs for year 1986-87*	
	under 65 years		*65 years and over*			
	supported by local authority	*Total*	*supported by local authority*	*Total*	*Gross[1] £ million*	*Net[2] £ million*
Local authority	4,234	4,234	100,594	100,594	697·9	415·7
Private	93	[3]3,214	558	[4]84,852	[5]29·1	[5]21·3
Voluntary	2,373	[3]4,848	3,277	[4]25,068		

[1] Excludes expenditure on administration, training and field work.
[2] Of charges paid by residents.
[3] Includes residents whose age is not known in homes for younger physically handicapped people.

[4] Includes residents whose age is not known in homes for elderly people.
[5] Includes costs for both residents fully supported by the local authority and those receiving partial support.
The average annual costs per resident for local authority homes were £6,658 gross and £3,966 net. It is not possible to give average costs for private and voluntary homes as the cost of residents fully supported by local authorities and the cost of partial support cannot be disaggregated.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons have had registrations cancelled under the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each year since its implementation.

Mr. Mellor: The number of persons notified to the Department whose registrations have been cancelled, under the Registered Homes Act 1984, since it came into operation on 1 January 1985 is as follows:

	Residential Care Homes	*Nursing Homes*	*Dually Registered*
1985	2	3	
1986	16	5	
1987	28	4	
1988	54	15	2

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much financial provision has been made by each of the registering authorities for the inspection of residential homes under the terms of the Residential Homes Act 1984.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available figures are shown in the table.

Expenditure on the registration and inspection of residental homes under Registered Homes Act 1984 in 1987-88
(£ thousand cash)

	Administration Costs
Avon	92
Bedfordshire	n/a
Berkshire	n/a
Buckinghamshire	n/a
Cambridgeshire	174
Cheshire	n/a
Cleveland	28
Cornwall	164
Cumbria	3
Derbyshire	72
Devon	260
Dorset	97
Durham	13
East Sussex	176
Essex	182
Gloucestershire	33
Hampshire	157
Hereford and Worcester	84
Hertfordshire	77
Humberside	n/a
Isle of Wight	60
Kent	61
Lancashire	280
Leicestershire	52
Lincolnshire	64
Norfolk	75
Northamptonshire	58
Northumberland	n/a
North Yorkshire	94
Nottinghamshire	58
Oxfordshire	20
Shropshire	34
Somerset	n/a
Staffordshire	57
Suffolk	42
Surrey	83
Warwickshire	62
West Sussex	95
Wiltshire	25
Isles of Scilly	n/a
Bolton	27
Bury	9
Manchester	n/a
Oldham	21
Rochdale	n/a
Salford	n/a
Stockport	20
Tameside	n/a
Trafford	39
Wigan	23
Knowsley	n/a
Liverpool	31
St. Helens	n/a
Sefton	79
Wirral	59
Barnsley	8
Doncaster	29
Rotherham	n/a
Sheffield	n/a
Gateshead	17
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	21
North Tyneside	n/a
South Tyneside	14
Sunderland	9
Birmingham	78
Coventry	1
Dudley	n/a
Sandwell	12
Solihull	n/a
Walsall	27
Wolverhampton	n/a
Bradford	62
Calderdale	20
Kirklees	16
Leeds	n/a
Wakefield	21
City of London	n/a
Camden	9
Greenwich	n/a
Hackney	n/a
Hammersmith and Fulham	n/a
Islington	8
Kensington and Chelsea	20
Lambeth	n/a
Lewisham	33
Southwark	n/a
Tower Hamlets	n/a
Wandsworth	8
Westminster	n/a
Barking and Dagenham	n/a
Barnet	48
Bexley	2
Brent	6
Bromley	40
Croydon	38
Ealing	n/a
Enfield	38
Haringey	n/a
Harrow	n/a
Havering	20
Hillingdon	33
Hounslow	n/a
Kingston-upon-Thames	n/a
Merton	13
Newham	n/a
Redbridge	15
Richmond-upon-Thames	9

	Administration Costs
Sutton	21
Waltham Forest	17

n/a = not available.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential homes are currently registered under the Residential Homes Act 1984 in each of the registering authorities.

Mr. Mellor: The latest available figures for the number of residential care homes registered with each local authority are given in the table.

Number of residential care homes registered with local authorities as at 31 March 1987 (provisional)

Registering local authority	*Homes for elderly and younger physically handicapped people*	*Homes for other client groups*	*Total homes*
Cleveland	31	2	33
Cumbria	75	5	80
Durham	37	1	38
Northumberland	40	3	43
Gateshead	9	3	12
Newcastle upon Tyne	27	3	30
North Tyneside	37	9	46
South Tyneside	11	2	13
Sunderland	23	0	23
Humberside	166	21	187
North Yorkshire	234	30	264
Barnsley	11	1	12
Doncaster	22	1	23
Rotherham	6	7	13
Sheffield	22	9	31
Bradford	91	3	94
Calderdale	28	1	29
Kirklees	36	3	39
Leeds	55	9	64
Wakefield	21	7	28
Cheshire	76	13	89
Lancashire	483	26	509
Bolton	28	0	28
Bury	14	1	15
Manchester	56	8	64
Oldham	28	2	30
Rochdale	15	0	15
Salford	15	3	18
Stockport	42	1	43
Tameside	21	1	22
Trafford	48	8	56
Wigan	13	2	15
Knowsley	4	0	4
Liverpool	45	12	57
Sefton	133	9	142
St. Helens	6	0	6
Wirral	65	20	85
Hereford and Worcester	149	34	183
Shropshire	82	7	89
Staffordshire	118	5	123
Warwickshire	74	30	104
Birmingham	130	34	164
Coventry	49	15	64
Dudley	40	12	52
Sandwell	10	3	13
Solihull	11	5	16
Walsall	19	3	22
Wolverhampton	29	3	32
Derbyshire	130	5	135
Leicestershire	96	26	122
Lincolnshire	114	12	126
Northamptonshire	88	15	103
Nottinghamshire	89	61	150
Bedfordshire	54	7	61
Berkshire	90	23	113
Buckinghamshire	47	17	64
Cambridgeshire	63	11	74
Essex	228	24	252
Hertfordshire	96	6	102
Norfolk	184	56	240
Oxfordshire	36	5	41
Suffolk	103	19	122
Camden	11	3	14
Greenwich	4	2	6
Hackney	3	5	8

Registering local authority	Homes for elderly and younger physically handicapped people	Homes for other client groups	Total homes
Hammersmith	2	0	2
Islington	2	4	6
Kensington	10	8	18
Lambeth	18	11	29
Lewisham	19	3	22
Southwark	9	2	11
Tower Hamlets	3	1	4
Wandsworth	15	10	25
Westminster	2	9	11
Barking	2	0	2
Barnet	57	4	61
Bexley	5	0	5
Brent	13	3	16
Bromley	43	11	54
Croydon	60	10	70
Ealing	33	5	38
Enfield	31	5	36
Haringey	18	14	32
Harrow	30	2	32
Havering	18	1	19
Hillingdon	8	0	8
Hounslow	3	3	6
Kingston upon Thames	26	3	29
Merton	21	2	23
Newham	6	0	6
Redbridge	21	1	22
Richmond upon Thames	13	7	20
Sutton	25	1	26
Waltham Forest	16	2	18
Dorset	352	13	365
Hampshire	429	26	455
Isle of Wight	85	8	93
Kent	185	50	235
Surrey	180	25	205
East Sussex	378	44	422
West Sussex	320	32	352
Wiltshire	97	26	123
Avon	198	59	257
Cornwall	183	23	206
Devon	618	68	686
Gloucestershire	97	11	108
Somerset	96	9	105
England	7,968	1,190	9,158

Note: Figures include certain homes which are exempt from registration under Section 1(5)(i) of the Registered Homes Act, including homes managed by bodies incorporated by royal charter.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that the level of inspection of residential homes provided by registering authorities under the provisions of the Residential Homes Act 1984 is sufficient.

Mr. Mellor: From 1 August 1988 the fees payable in respect of registration and inspection of residential care homes were substantially increased to enable local authorities to carry out their duties effectively. The minimum number of inspections was increased from one to two a year. In addition, the Department, in conjunction with the Welsh Office has commissioned training material for registration and inspection staff of authorities from the centre for environmental and social studies in aging at the polytechnic of north London. This material should be available later this year.

The Department's social services inspectorate has carried out a study of the implementation of the Registered Homes Act 1984 by local authorities. Its report "Certain Standards" was published last year. The Wagner report, "Residential Care: A Positive Choice" which was also published last year, contained recommendations on the regulation of these homes. Both reports are in the Library. We are giving careful consideration to the findings of these reports before deciding whether any change is desirable in the current arrangements.

School Medicine

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years for the Trent regional health authority, the number of nurses engaged in school medicine and related care of children.

Mr. Mellor: The numbers of staff in post working in school health and special schools are shown in the table.

National Health Service staff in post in Trent regional health authority
Nursing staff in primary health care at 30 September
Whole-time equivalents[1]

	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
School health	350	360	340	340	320
Special schools	20	20	20	10	20
School health and special schools	370	380	360	350	340

Source: Department of Health (SR7) annual census of National Health Service non-medical manpower.

[1] Figures independently rounded to nearest 10 whole-time equivalents.

Some nursing staff working in hospitals and the community will be engaged in the care of children as part of their general nursing duties. These staff cannot, however, be identified centrally.

Trent Regional Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the services provided by the Trent regional health authority; and what is the catchment area.

Mr. Mellor: Provision of local services is a matter for the health authorities concerned. I am sending the hon. Member a copy of Trent regional health authority's latest annual report which contains the information he seeks.

Sex Change Operations

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of sex change operations performed by the National Health Service in the Trent regional health authority for *(a)* male to female and *(b)* female to male, for the last 20 years; and what has been the cost to public funds in each case.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 22 February at column *674*.

Electors

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East 28 February, *Official Report*, column *134*, if he will supply a pre-publication list of the numbers of electors registered for each constituency in England and Wales for 1989-90.

Mr. Freeman: Statistics from the electoral registers for 1989-90 are still being assembled centrally. Figures relating to local government areas will be published in an OPCS Monitor (EL 89/1) at the end of April; those relating to parliamentary constituencies in "Electoral Statistics: 1989" (Series EL No. 16) at the end of May. I do not propose to supply pre-publication lists of numbers of electors.

Glenside Hospital

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, with reference to his answers to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), *Official Report*, 9 June 1988, columns *666-68* and to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), *Official Report*, 5 December 1988, column *88*, he will now clarify the status of Glenside hospital in the South West regional health authority.

Mr. Freeman: The future role of Glenside hospital together with all other mental health units in Avon is being reviewed in the light of the White Paper "Working for Patients" and an Avon-wide mental health paper. A regional secure unit, Fromeside clinic, was opened in October 1988 on the Glenside site.

Psychogeriatrics

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants there are working full-time in psychogeriatrics in the United Kingdom; and how many people over the age of 65 years there are per consultant.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold this information centrally at present. Psychogeriatrics has been established recently as a separate specialty and there are plans to collect manpower figures in the future. In a joint report published in February this year, the Royal Colleges of Psychiatrists and Physicians estimated that there are currently 243 consultants working in old-age psychiatry and that at the end of 1986 about 70 per cent. of the United Kingdom elderly population had a specialist psychogeriatric service available to them. These figures represent a considerable advance in recent years.

Heart Disease

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the cost to the National Health Service of health problems due to heart disease; and whether he will take the initiative to develop policy on the prevention of the disease.

Mr. Mellor: The cost to the National Health Service in this country of the treatment of coronary heart disease is estimated to be over £500 million a year.

It was the Government's concern about the high incidence of disease and premature death caused by coronary heart disease that led to the launch in April 1987 of the "Look After Your Heart" campaign, promoted jointly by the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority. This campaign has the long-term objective of contributing to a substantial reduction in the incidence of coronary heart disease in England by the year 2000. The campaign, which adopts a multi-faced approach involving mass media publicity and community and workplace strategies, is, we believe, proving highly successful in raising awareness of risk factors and stimulating widespread activity at national and local level aimed at encouraging and supporting the adoption of healthier lifestyles on smoking, alcohol, nutrition and exercise.

In addition, the Standing Medical Advisory Committee has been asked to look at the cost-effectiveness of cholesterol screening. The primary care White Paper has emphasised the enhanced role of general practitioners in health promotion and prevention. The reports to be produced by the new local and regional directors of public health will provide each district and region with an epidemiological overview of the health of the local population, from which districts will be better able to identify the main health problems (including coronary heart disease) which their policies and programmes need to address.

New Parent-Infant Network Charity

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department expects to complete its study of the New Parent-Infant Network charity.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Health expects to reach a decision on the New Parent-Infant Network's application for grant aid within the next few weeks.

Operating Theatres

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the available theatre operating time in the National Health Service in England in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of theatre sessions available for operating in the National Health Service in England in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: Information on the use of operating theatres was not collected centrally prior to 1987-88. In 1987-88 the total number of sessions held in NHS hospitals in England was 692,804.

Ambulances (Emergency Calls)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the average response times for emergency ambulance calls in 1979 and the latest year available in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Liverpool, *(d)* Glasgow, *(e)* Cornwall and *(f)* East Anglia.

Mr. Freeman: The information available on response times is not precisely in the form requested. Data are collected about the times within which *(a)* 50 per cent. and *(b)* 95 per cent. of calls are responded to, rather than the average response times.

The latest figures relate to the financial year 1987-88, and are shown in the table. Figures for 1979 were not collected centrally. Figures relating to the financial years 1983-84 to 1986-87 are included in the package of health service indicators provided by the Department, which is in the Library. Information concerning provision of services in Glasgow is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Patient Transport Services
Response times within which 50 per cent. and 95 per cent. of calls are responded to

Ambulance authority	*50 per cent. Minutes*	*95 per cent. Minutes*
London	10·00	19·00
Mersey Metropolitan	6·50	13·80
West Midlands Metropolitan	7·60	13·80
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	9·00	25·00
Cambridgeshire	8·00	18·00
Norfolk	6·40	17·70
Suffolk	7·50	20·50

Source: DH form KA34

Hospital Closures

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the number of *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* casualty units and *(c)* ante-natal units that have been closed since 1979 in (i) London, (ii) Birmingham, (iii) Manchester, (iv) Coventry, (v) Derby, (vi) Reading, (vii) Glasgow, (viii) Leicester, (ix) Leeds and (x) Edinburgh.

Mr. Freeman The following table gives the numbers of hospitals or units which we are aware have been approved for total closure from 1979—end 1987, the latest date for which figures are available.

Information on casualty units and ante-natal clinics is not collected centrally.

	Number
London	63
Birmingham	3
Manchester	3
Coventry	1
Derby	8
Reading	1
Leicester	6
Leeds	6

Information on hospitals in Glasgow and Edinburgh is the responsibility of my hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of all National Health Service hospitals *(a)* closed and *(b)* agreed for closure each year since 1979, for each regional health authority in England.

Mr. Freeman: I have placed in the Library a list of all hospitals or facilities approved for total closure for the period 1979—to the end of 1987. Many of these hospitals were closed in conjunction with the opening of new hospitals or facilities in the area.

Mortality Rates

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide *(a)* perinatal, *(b)* neonatal and *(c)* infant mortality rates for each year since 1979 in Scotland, England and Wales separately with comparable figures for Germany, Sweden, France and the United States of America.

Mr. Freeman The information for each year for England, Wales and Scotland is shown in the tables, which also give comparable data for the other countries. These latter data have been taken from a number of international publications as indicated[1]. Where no figure is given, this indicates that insufficient data were available from these publications.

(a) Perinatal mortality rate by country 1979 to 1987

Country	*Year*								
	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
England	14·6	13·4	11·7	11·2	10·3	10·0	9·8	9·5	8·9
Wales	15·6	12·8	14·1	11·1	11·3	10·5	10·2	10·3	9·2
Scotland	14·1	13·1	11·6	11·5	10·6	11·0	9·8	10·2	8·9
Germany, Federal Republic	[3]12·6	[3]11·6	[3]10·5	[3]9·6	[3]9·3	[3]8·6	[3]7·9	[3]7·6	n.a.
Sweden	[3]9·1	[3]8·7	[3]7·7	[3]7·8	[3]7·3	[3]7·3	[4]7·3	n.a.	n.a.
France	[3]13·8	[3]12·9	[3]12·3	[3]11·9	[3]11·4	[3]11·2	[3]10·7	[3]10·4	n.a.
United States of America	[2]13·9	[4]14·1	[3]13·4	[4]15·2	[4]14·5	[4]14·0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Rates provided are as published in:
[1] United Nations "Demographic Yearbook".
[2] World Health Organisation "World Health Statistics Annual".
[3] The Statistical Office of the European Community "Eurostat Demographic Statistics".
[4] No rate published in volumes, calculation made from data provided in [1] and [2] above.

(b) Neonatal mortality rate by country 1979 to 1987

Country	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
England	8·2	7·6	6·6	6·2	5·8	5·5	5·3	5·2	5·0
Wales	8·4	7·9	8·1	6·9	6·7	5·7	5·8	5·6	5·0
Scotland	8·7	7·8	6·9	7·1	5·8	6·4	5·5	5·2	4·7
Germany, Federal Republic	[3]8·6	[3]7·8	[3]7·0	[3]6·3	[3]5·9	[3]5·5	[3]5·0	[3]4·8	n.a.
Sweden	[2]5·3	[2]4·9	[3]4·5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	[4]4·1	n.a.	n.a.
France	[3]6·0	[3]5·8	[3]5·5	[3]5·3	[3]5·0	[3]4·7	[3]4·6	[3]4·3	n.a.
United States of America	[2]8·9	[4]8·5	[4]8·0	[4]7·7	[4]7·3	[4]7·0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Rates provided are as published in:
[1] United Nations "Demographic Yearbook".
[2] World Health Organisation "World Health Statistics Annual".
[3] The Statistical Office of the European Community "Eurostat Demographic Statistics".
[4] No rate published in volumes, calculation made from data provided in [1] and [2] above.

(c) Infant mortality rate by country 1979 to 1987

Country	Year								
	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
England	12·8	12·0	10·9	10·8	10·0	9·4	9·2	9·5	9·1
Wales	12·4	11·4	12·6	10·6	10·7	8·8	9·8	9·5	9·5
Scotland	12·8	12·1	11·3	11·4	9·9	10·3	9·4	8·8	8·5
Germany, Federal Republic	[3]13·6	[3]12·7	[3]11·6	[3]10·9	[3]10·2	[3]9·6	[3]9·0	[2]8·5	n.a.
Sweden	[1]7·5	[1]6·9	[4]7·0	[1]6·8	[2]7·2	[2]6·4	[2]6·7	[2]5·9	n.a.
France	[3]10·0	[3]10·0	[3]9·7	[3]9·5	[3]9·1	[3]8·3	[3]8·3	[2]7·9	n.a.
United States of America	[1]12·9	[1]12·6	[2]11·9	[1]11·5	[2]10·9	[1]10·6	[2]10·5	[2]10·4	n.a.

Rates provided are as published in:
[1] United Nations "Demographic Yearbook".
[2] World Health Organisation "World Health Statistics Annual".
[3] The Statistical Office of the European Community "Eurostat Demographic Statistics".
[4] No rate published in volumes, calculation made from data provided in [1] and [2] above.

National Health Service (Staff Training)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide an estimate of the cost of training *(a)* a state registered nurse, *(b)* an operating theatre nurse, *(c)* a speech therapist, *(d)* a consultant and *(e)* a junior hospital doctor.

Mr. Mellor: The estimated cost of training a registered general nurse over a three-year course is £14,000. The figure excludes that part of the cost of the trainee's remuneration and other costs estimated to represent the value of the contribution the trainee makes to patient services. The other costs requested are not held centrally.

National Health Service Reform

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which interested parties will be consulted by his Department over the composition of the list of treatments included in budgets for general practitioners.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department will be discussing the composition of the list of treatments included in practice budgets for general medical practitioners with the profession and with National Health Service managers. Specific invitations to discuss working papers 3 and 4 have been issued to the general medical services committee and the Royal College of General Practitioners.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the formula which will determine the weighting element of the capitation allowance payable to general practitioners under the terms of working paper and of the White Paper on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The relative weights to be included in the capitation formula will be determined after the discussions with interested parties, referred to in the working paper on indicative prescribing budgets for general medical practitioners, have taken place.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention that where a group practice opts out of the budget-holding scheme for general practitioners the practice income will be preserved at the level of the last year of budget holding.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: If a practice decides to leave the practice budget scheme, the normal remuneration arrangements for general medical practitioners will apply.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will publish the evidence relating to working paper 3 of the White Paper on the National Health Service, in respect of practice budgets offering general practitioners an opportunity to improve the quality of their services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Practice budgets will offer general medical practitioners an opportunity to improve the quality and standard of service to patients. Those practices with budgets will be able to decide how to make the most effective use of funds in order to provide the best possible service to their patients. The proposed development of

medical audit should ensure the maintenance and indeed raising of standards both generally and in participating practices. Improving the quality of family doctor services is also a major objective of the White Paper "Promoting Better Health". The proposals set out in "General Practice in the NHS: A New Contract", published in February, should achieve that objective by better rewarding those doctors whose standards are high and who provide a wide range of high quality services geared to patients' needs.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms will be introduced to ensure impartial judgments are made as to the appropriateness of patient referrals to accident and emergency units in order to meet the requirements of the White Paper on the National Health Service that accident and emergency referral would not be used as a substitute for out-patient referral.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Health authorities will be expected to make arrangements at hospital level to monitor attendances to ensure that referrals to accident and emergency units are not used as a substitute for out-patient referrals.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what formulae will be used to measure relative need for services provided by general practitioners who become budget-holders under the terms of the Government's White Paper on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are now considering the precise method of determining the relative need for services by patients. The practice budget scheme will be structured so that general medical practitioners have no financial incentive to refuse to treat any categories of patients.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms exist, or will be established, within regional health authorities, to enable them to adjudicate in disputes arising over the treatments to be included within general practitioner's budgets, as proposed in working paper 3 of the White Paper on the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Regional health authorities already have medical advice available to them which could be used for this purpose.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has collected on whether doctors will seek to remove patients from their lists on budgetary grounds where the costs of investigation and treatment are borne by general practitioner's practices.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Practice budgets will be set at a level which will reflect the relative need for services by patients registered with the practice. The elderly will attract a higher contribution to the budget than the young, and in exceptional cases adjustments will be made in respect of individual patients who need more costly treatment.

The Government do not believe that doctors will seek to remove patients from their lists on budgetary grounds nor be slow to accept patients. If, however, a practice did adopt a policy of selective registration, it could have its budget withdrawn by the RHA.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he proposes to adjust indicative budgets for general practitioners to accommodate practices which initially have below average prescribing costs but rapidly increase their diagnosis and treatment rates for common conditions.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We accept that the properly planned introduction of improved patient services, such as screening for certain conditions, may lead to an increase in prescribing of particular drugs. Practices intending to introduce such services will need to discuss their plans in advance with the family practitioner committee so that the financial implications can be fully considered when allocating prescribing budgets to practices.

As set out in working paper 4, "Indicative Prescribing Budgets for General Medical Practitioners", the FPC will be expected to compare expenditure with its budget profile and also information on what is prescribed and dispensed. They will be expected to investigate any significant diversions of actual and planned expenditure and take early and effective action. The FPC will be expected to accept and accommodate reasonable explanations for the variation.

Preventive Services

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted to establish the effect of attaching a financial cost to preventive services provided by general practitioners on uptake of these services.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Health promotion and illness prevention are central to the Government's objectives for general practitioner services. As made clear in "General Practice in the NHS: A New Contract", published in February, the Government will make the provision of health promotion a specific requirement in general practitioners' terms of service, and will introduce a health promotion sessional payment.

As working paper 3, "Practice Budgets for General Medical Practitioners", makes clear, the Department will discuss with the medical profession whether budgets should be set at a level which includes the cost of diagnostic investigations associated with health prevention and screening or whether they should be excluded from the scope of the scheme and charged to the patient's DHA.

Plastic Surgery

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time for plastic surgery patients who have not yet been admitted to hospital *(a)* in the Leicestershire health authority, *(b)* in the Trent region and *(c)* nationally.

Mr. Mellor: Average waiting times for those awaiting admission to hospital are not available centrally. The numbers on the waiting list are analysed by time waited and a percentage distribution based on this information is given in the table.

Percentage distribution of cases on the in-patient waiting list by time waited, as at 30 September 1988, Plastic surgery specialty

	Months waited				
	0 to 2	*3 to 5*	*6 to 8*	*9 to 11*	*12+*
Leicestershire District Health Authority	18	10	10	9	53
Trent Regional Health Authority	12	12	10	10	57
England	14	12	9	7	58

Smoking

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of expenditure by the Health Education Authority and the Health Education Council, in the last five years for which figures are available, on publicity and other materials designed to discourage smoking.

Mr. Mellor: The figures (actual expenditure) are as follows:

Health Education Council

	Campaigns/ associated expenditure £
1983-84	2,629,708
1984-85	1,624,221
1985-86	2,345,704
1986-87	1,118,025

Health Education Authority

	1987-88 £
Campaigns/Promotion	562,635
Publications	170,776

These figures do not reflect total spending, since smoking health education is included in many other authority programmes, such as "Look After Your Heart", cancer, and the young people's programme.

On 25 January 1989 my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a new £2 million a year campaign over the next four years, to be run jointly by the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority, aimed at halving the proportion of teenagers who smoke.

Lipid-lowering Drugs

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the level and cost of prescribing lipid-lowering drugs for the last 12 month period for which figures are available; and what were the comparable figures for the corresponding periods over the previous five years.

Mr. Mellor: The number of prescriptions for and net ingredient cost of lipid-lowering drugs dispensed by community pharmacists in England in each of the last six years was as follows:

	Number of Prescriptions (thousand)	*Net Ingredient Cost (£ million)*
1987	261	4·7
1986	241	3·4
1985	238	2·8
1984	239	2·4
1983	240	2·2
1982	264	2·1

Private Hospitals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision there is for the inspection of private hospitals.

Mr. Mellor: District health authorities are required to inspect each private hospital at least twice a year. Inspections may be unannounced and "out of hours".

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names and ownership by company of private hospitals operating in each of the English health regions.

Mr. Mellor: This information is not collected centrally. However, "Laing's Review of Private Health Care 1988," a copy of which is in the Library, gives details of private hospitals.

Water Supplies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals or other National Health Service units receive water from *(a)* boreholes and *(b)* non-mains sources.

Mr. Freeman: Information on the number of hospitals or other NHS units receiving water from boreholes or other non-mains sources is not available. Health authorities are, however, required to comply with the water byelaws in force and comprehensive advice on water supply and quality was issued to them most recently in the DH code of practice, the control of legionellae in health care premises.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what inspection is undertaken of water supplies used *(a)* in the Queen's medical centre, Nottingham and *(b)* in National Health Service hospitals as standard procedure.

Mr. Freeman: In general, responsibility for the quality of water, from whatever source, rests with the appropriate water authority. The quality of water stored and distributed within all health care premises is mainly governed by inspection and maintenance of plant and equipment in those premises and I refer to my other reply to him today.

Operation Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were contracted out to private hospitals in the Trent regional health authority; and at what cost during 1988.

Mr. Mellor: The information is not available in the form requested. The latest available figures for Trent are for the 1986 calendar year and show a total of 816 discharges and deaths of patients receiving treatment under contractual arrangements with institutions outside the NHS. Expenditure in the Trent region on contractual

arrangements for patient treatment with non-NHS hospitals and homes was about £1,189,000 in 1986-87. This is a total figure and so includes sums incurred under contracts with voluntary and other organisations as well as private hospitals as such.

Whitley Council Negotiating Machinery

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to review the Whitley council negotiating machinery.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Not at the moment. The White Paper "Working for Patients" records our objective progressively to introduce greater local flexibility into the determination of NHS pay and conditions of service. This will require changes in the nature and scope of national agreements but not necessarily in the present central negotiating machinery.

Wakefield District Health Authority

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions since its inception Wakefield district health authority has amended a policy decision in respect of a proposed closure or change of use of health buildings following public consultation in accordance with his Department's circular HSC(15)207.

Mr. Freeman: Such information is not collected centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Wakefield health authority in the event that such detail is held locally.

Spina Bifida

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated for spina bifida during each of the last three years; what was the cost per patient; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested for the last three years for which data are available centrally is given in the following table.

Estimated number of in-patients with main diagnosis of spina bifida (ICD 741)[1], discharged from National Health Service non-psychiatric hospitals, England

	Number
1983	2,390
1984	1,960
1985	2,070

[1] ICD—International Classification of Diseases: 9th revision.

The cost of hospital treatment is estimated at £1,500 per in-patient stay at 1987-88 prices. Expenditure on care of patients in the community cannot reliably be estimated from data held centrally.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of pregnant woman were screened for spina bifida during the last three years, listed by regions;

(2) how many pregnant mothers were screened for spina bifida during the last three years; what was the cost per patient; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not collected centrally. However, I understand that it is common clinical practice to offer screening for spina bifida to pregnant women.

Neural Tube Defects

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many pregnancies were terminated because of neural tube defects during each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what percentage of pregnant women had terminations for neural tube defects during each of the last three years, listed by regions.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table.

Number of (a) conceptions, (b) terminations with central nervous system malformation in foetus[1] as principal medical condition, England and Wales, Regional Health Authority of usual residence, 1985 to 1987

	1985			*1986*			*1987*		
	(a) (000's)	*(b)*	*(b) as a percentage of (a)*	*(a) (000's)*	*(b)*	*(b) as a percentage of (a)*	*(a) (000's)*	*(b)*	*(b) as a percentage of (a)*
England and Wales	797·2	520	·07	818·9	557	·07	841·1	531	·06
Regional Health Authorities									
Northern	46·1	44	·1	46·6	36	·08	47·1	56	·12
Yorkshire	56·2	27	·05	57·4	45	·08	58·7	33	·06
Trent	69·1	45	·07	70·9	63	·09	72·6	56	·08
East Anglian	28·6	21	·07	30·1	24	·08	30·7	23	·07
North West Thames	63·2	23	·04	64·5	20	·03	66·4	25	·04
North East Thames	69·3	40	·06	71·2	38	·05	74·5	43	·06
South East Thames	59·4	25	·04	62·9	25	·04	65·0	29	·04
South West Thames	46·0	22	·05	47·5	20	·04	48·9	18	·04
Wessex	41·8	34	·08	43·5	45	·1	44·5	29	·07
Oxford	39·3	24	·06	40·9	34	·08	42·1	25	·06
South Western	44·7	21	·05	45·9	36	·08	47·3	28	·06
West Midland	85·6	66	·08	87·3	42	·05	89·6	45	·05
Mersey	38·8	36	·09	39·4	25	·06	40·0	45	·11
North Western	65·9	49	·07	66·5	49	·07	68·5	46	·07

[1] International classification of diseases (9th revision) 655·0

Nursing Home Owners (Payments)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what payments are made by nursing home owners to general practitioners to facilitate their provision of primary care and other services.

Mr. Mellor: Under his terms of service a general practitioner, except in certain specified circumstances which are not relevant here, may not accept a fee or any other remuneration for any treatment which he gives to a person for whom he is responsible to provide general medical service.

Nurses (Regrading)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if nurses who commenced post-registration training on or after 1 April 1988 have the right of appeal concerning their recent clinical grading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Yes. All nursing and midwifery staff whose posts were regraded have the right of appeal under the general Whitley council appeals procedure.

Skin and Hair Cream

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the levels of chlorinated biphenyls and organophosphates found in lanolin-based skin and hair creams with particular reference to nipple and breast creams.

Mr. Freeman: None. Chlorinated biphenyls are not used for animal treatment and organophosphates are used in a way that should leave minimal residues in the lanolin used for manufacturing these creams. The main supplies provide very tight specifications for lanolin used in cosmetics.

Child Care

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total public expenditure on *(a)* local authority day nurseries, *(b)* local authority playgroups and *(c)* other day care facilities for each year from 1975 to 1988 in (i) cash and (ii) real terms; and what was the total number of children participating in each type of provision for each year, together with the percentage that total was of all children in the three to four years age group.

Mr. Mellor: Information is not collected centrally on the exact age of children participating in each type of day care.

Table 1 gives the net current expenditure by local authorities for the years 1975-76 to 1986-87 inclusive. Data for 1987-88 are not yet available.

The information available centrally on the numbers of children participating in local authority provision for children under five is published annually in "Children's day care facilities, at 31 March, England" (A/F/6), copies of which are available in the Library.

Table 2 gives these figures, expressed as a percentage of all children aged three and four years.

Information for 1988 is not yet available.

Table 1
Net current expenditure by local authorities (i) Cash

£ thousands

Year	(a) Day nurseries		(b) Playgroups		(c) Child minding		(d) Family centres
	Local authority	*Other*	*Local authority*	*Other*	*Local authority*	*Other*	*All*
1975-76	23,919	433	1,489	420	—	—	854
1976-77	29,555	581	1,866	523	—	—	1,017
1977-78	32,769	726	2,177	486	—	—	1,160
1978-79	36,704	950	2,222	743	—	—	1,832
1979-80	43,034	1,119	3,200	688	—	—	2,247
1980-81	56,952	1,147	4,019	524	—	—	3,081
1981-82	64,657	1,570	4,708	670	—	—	3,948
1982-83	71,427	1,657	5,265	524	934	842	5,170
1983-84	77,830	1,619	5,417	530	1,505	1,258	6,291
1984-85	83,030	1,713	5,686	613	1,917	1,489	7,655
1985-86	84,180	1,914	[illegible]	804	2,831	1,418	13,526
1986-87	95,779	1,972	8,008	967	3,517	1,496	13,367
	(ii) *In real terms at 1986-87 prices (GDP deflator)*						
1975-76	66,480	1,202	4,140	1,168	—	—	2,374
1976-77	72,511	1,425	4,577	1,283	—	—	2,496
1977-78	70,693	1,567	4,696	1,047	—	—	2,502
1978-79	71,404	1,849	4,323	1,445	—	—	3,564
1979-80	71,774	1,866	5,337	1,148	—	—	3,748
1980-81	80,123	1,614	5,654	737	—	—	4,335
1981-82	82,882	2,013	6,035	859	—	—	5,061
1982-83	85,507	1,984	6,303	627	1,118	1,008	6,189
1983-84	89,046	1,852	6,198	606	1,722	1,439	7,198
1984-85	90,523	1,868	6,199	668	2,090	1,623	8,346
1985-86	87,012	1,978	6,240	831	2,926	1,466	13,981
1986-87	95,779	1,972	8,008	967	3,517	1,496	13,367

Table 2: Local authority provision of day care for children, England, 1975-87: Numbers as a percentage of children aged three and four[1]

As at 31 March	Day nurseries		Playgroups		Child minding	
	Children on registers of facilities provided by local authorities	*Children placed and paid for by local authorities in other facilities*	*Children on registers of facilities provided by local authorities*	*Children placed and paid for by local authorities in other facilities*	*Places available with local authority provided childminders*	*Children placed and paid for by local authorities with other childminders*
1975	1·81	0·08	0·20	0·30	[2]—	0·05
1976	1·97	0·11	0·20	0·31	[2]—	0·07
1977	2·19	0·12	0·19	0·36	[2]—	0·09
1978	2·35	0·12	0·20	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
1979	2·48	0·14	[3]—	0·44	[3]—	[3]—
1980	2·68	0·17	0·22	0·40	[3]—	[3]—
1981	2·90	0·18	0·24	0·39	[3]—	[3]—
1982	3·00	0·15	0·26	0·49	0·23	0·18
1983	2·91	0·13	0·28	0·63	0·20	0·22
1984	2·87	0·12	0·25	0·78	0·19	0·18
1985	2·76	0·13	0·27	0·81	0·10	0·25
1986	2·95	0·15	0·27	0·97	0·13	0·33
1987	2·93	0·15	0·28	1·03	0·15	0·42

[1] Information on the exact age of children using each type of provision is not collected centrally; some children using day care provision are aged under three
[2] Data not available
[3] Data available, but not reliable

Notes:
Information about the number of children attending family centres is not collected.

General Practitioners

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many general practitioner practices there are in each family practitioner area; and what is the average list size in each family practitioner area to England;

(2) how many general practitioner practices there are with 11,000 or more patients for each family practitioner committee area in England.

Mr. Mellor: A table giving the information requested as at 1 October 1987 (the latest date for which figures are available) has been placed in the Library.

Hospital Trusts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the level of remuneration proposed for chairs and non-executive directors of National Health Service hospital trusts will be in line with the existing payments made to chairs of health authorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am considering the question of remuneration for the chairmen and non-executive members of National Health Service hospital trusts.

Community Health Councils

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the rights of community health councils in relation to non-National Health Service agencies providing hospital services under contract to health authorities as proposed by the National Health Service White Paper; and how they will be resourced to meet the additional work load arising.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Rights of community health councils will not change as a result of the White Paper proposals. I do not therefore foresee that they will experience any problem over carrying out their statutory duty to represent the interests of National Health Service patients in their districts. They receive adequate resources for that purpose and the White Paper does not impose any additional duties or burdens upon them.

Ambulances (Costs)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current average cost of purchase of an ambulance.

Mr. Freeman: Based on annual returns from all regional health authorities the average overall cost of purchase of first line ambulances in 1988-89, including VAT, was £21,568 for glass reinforced plastic vehicles and £20,291 for van conversions.

Eyes and Teeth (Tests)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the cost in 1988 of providing free tests for eyes and teeth.

Mr. Mellor: Information on costs is available only by financial year. The estimated cost in England of sight tests provided under the general ophthalmic service in 1988-89, the final 12 months before withdrawal of the universal entitlement to National Health Service sight tests is £114 million. The cost to the general dental service of National Health Service dental examinations in 1987-88, the last full year in which no patient charges were levied for examinations, was £113 million.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Mellor: The estimated total expenditure in 1988 on health-related consultancy contracts was £2·413 million.

Expenditure was from a joint health and social security budget and has had to be apportioned where consultants were engaged on projects covering both health and social security matters.

A list giving details of each health-related management or computer consultancy awarded in 1988 has been placed in the Library.

Blood Transfusion Service (West Midlands)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much blood has *(a)* been at the disposal of *(b)* been provided to private hospitals by the West Midlands regional blood transfusion service for each of the years; 1988-89, 1987-88 and 1986-87.

Mr. Freeman: The latest information held centrally for the West Midlands regional blood transfusion service is as follows:

	Number of useable blood donations collected	*Number of units of blood supplied to non-NHS hospitals*
1986	192,599	10,154
1987[1]	192,468	9,086

[1] Provisional figures.

Operating Department Assistants

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Warrington, North of Friday, 17 March, *Official Report*, column *388*, when the working group of the management side of the professional and technical staff B Whitley council examining the pay and grade structures of operating department assistants will make its report.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that the PTB management side's working group expects to report back in time for its conclusions to influence pay negotiations this year.

Hon. Member for Derbyshire, South

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Warrington North, of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *525*, who will pay the £170 for the administrative officer who is managing and safeguarding papers which are being consulted by the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at his Department.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The cost of £170 for managing and safeguarding the papers being consulted by the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will be met by my Department in accordance with long standing practice in these matters.

Chemotherapy

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the centres of research into chemotherapy to treat cancer, the means of financing such centres and research papers published arising from the research.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally.

Children Bill *[Lords]*

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated amount of extra grant aid needed by local authorities to implement the provisions of the Children Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Discussions have taken place with the local authority associations about the additional costs to local authorities of the provisions of the Children Bill, and the estimates are set out in the financial memorandum to the Bill. The estimates and any further comments by the associations will be taken into account in determining the level of central Government support to local authorities at the appropriate time.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed timetable for the introduction of any Act resulting from the Children Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor at Second Reading in the other place on 6 December at column 535.

Guardians ad Litem

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the four panels of guardians ad litem currently being surveyed by the social services inspectorate; if he will give the terms of reference for this survey; and if he will place a copy of the report of the survey in the Library.

Mr. Mellor: The social services inspectorate is conducting *(a)* a postal survey of all panels of guardians ad litem and reporting officers in England and *(b)* more detailed inspections of panels administered singly by Dorset and Cumbria local authorities and in consortia by Wigan, Salford and Bolton and Leeds, Bradford and Calderdale authorities.

The inspectorate will study demand for the services of panel members and how this is being met including the resources utilised, the skills required and the workloads of individual panel members; examine how individual members fulfil their role and arrangements for monitoring; and report with recommendations of national relevance.

I expect to be able to publish the report later this year.

Pharmaceutical Prices

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmaceutical companies have not applied for any price increases in the last two, three and five years.

Mr. Mellor: For companies who have provided full financial returns under the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme for each year since 1984, the numbers of companies not applying for any price increase from the date shown to 31 December 1988 is as follows:

	Number
1 January 1987	17
1 January 1986	15
1 January 1984	10

Sight Testing

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the report of his Department's optical adviser on the accuracy and reliability of autorefraction and auto optitesters for testing sight;

(2) if he will permit the lower tier sight test proposed in his recent consultative letter to be conducted by staff who are not qualified opticians using an autorefractor and an auto optitester.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The Opticians Act 1958 provides that sight tests may only be conducted by a registered medical practitioner or registered ophthalmic optician. We have no plans at present to change this requirement. I am not aware of any report on autorefractors or auto optitesters but I understand that autorefractors and auto optitesters offer a reasonably accurate method of testing sight although they cannot provide a test for binocular vision.

Sheep Dips

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Medical Research Council on the link between sheep dip and cot deaths.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* There have been no discussions between the Secretary of State and the Medical Research Council (MRC) on the possibility of a link between sheep dip and cot deaths.

The MRC, which is the main agency through which the Government supports medical research, receives a grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. Over the years, the MRC has funded a wide range of research related to cot deaths. Officials will be discussing with the MRC what further avenues can be fruitfully pursued.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Production and Employment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what has been the growth in production, employment and productivity for *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* pharmaceuticals over the period 1979 to the present; and if he will in each case estimate what part (i) changes in employment and (ii) changes in production have had on productivity changes.

Mr. Maude: The official data series on productivity are published by the Department of Employment in the *Employment Gazette* but these do not include separately identifiable figures for the pharmaceutical industry. The following data from the annual census of production provide the required information for manufacturing industry and the pharmaceutical industry. These figures may show different movements from the official series which are derived from other sources. Full data for years after 1986 are not yet available.

Year	*Production (Gross value added) (1985 prices)* £ *billion*	*Employment* *thousands*	*Productivity (Gross value added per head) (1985 prices)* £ *thousands*
Manufacturing industry			
1979	85·4	6,910	12·4
1980	75·9	6,495	11·7
1981	70·3	5,778	12·2
1982	68·2	5,360	12·7
1983	72·7	5,070	14·3
1984	76·0	5,059	15·0
1985	76·5	4,976	15·4
1986	75·9	4,878	15·6
Pharmaceutical products[1]			
1979	1·67	74·4	22·4
1980	1·58	73·3	21·6
1981	1·52	69·8	21·8
1982	1·69	68·6	24·6
1983	1·75	67·9	25·7
1984	1·92	67·6	28·5
1985	1·95	66·9	29·1
1986	2·06	68·4	30·1

[1] The pharmaceutical products industry comprises Group 257 of the Standard Industrial Classification (Revised 1980).

Source: Annual Census of Production.

Bicycle Imports

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what consideration he has given to the Bicycle Association's official report for the year ended 1988, and if, in the light of the increase in cycle imports from 600,000 in 1986 to 1,305,000 in 1988, he will seek a review of the European Economic Community duty-free provisions for underdeveloped or developing nations;

(2) if he will review China's developing nation status in view of changes in its industrial output.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Bicycle Association's annual report does not refer to the developing country imports nor have I received representations. The European Community's generalised system of preference for developing countries is reviewed each year. The competitiveness of products is one of the factors taken into account in the decision to renew the arrangements.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will review the duties on Taiwanese and Singapore components which can be imported free of duty as components of cycles imported from underdeveloped countries, but become subject to duty if imported for use in British cycle manufacture.

Mr. Alan Clark: There is no tariff concession for imports of bicycles and components from Taiwan. Both bicycles and components from Singapore are covered by the EC's generalised system of preferences.

EFTA

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with the EFTA countries.

Mr. Maude: United Kingdom relations with the EFTA countries are already very close—both bilaterally and through EC/EFTA co-operation. We are firmly committed to strengthening these relations still further. The EFTA countries are a major trading partner and all have free trade agreements with the EC. Close co-operation continues under the framework of the Luxembourg declaration agreed by EC and EFTA Ministers in 1984. This has already resulted in worthwhile practical achievements in reducing and eliminating remaining barriers to trade. At an informal EC/EFTA ministerial meeting on 20 March, ways of broadening and deepening the relationship were discussed. There will be a further ministerial meeting before the end of the year. The United Kingdom welcomes this intensification of activities and will play a full role in it.

Link Scheme

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will give the Government funds committed in 1987 and 1988 under the link scheme.

Mr. Forth: The first five link programmes were announced on 3 February 1988 and subsequently another five programmes were announced during the year. Total Government funding authorised under the 10 link programmes announced in 1988 amounted to £59·3 million.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will provide figures for spending on *(a)* regional assistance and *(b)* regional development grants for England, by region, for each year from 1978-79 to 1988-89 and plans for 1989-90 to 1991-92, in cash and at 1987-88 prices.

Mr. Atkins: Gross annual expenditure on regional development grants and regional selective assistance by English region from 1978-79 to 1987-88 at current and constant (1987-88 = 100) prices was as follows:

Expenditure at current prices

£ millions

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
1. *Regional development grants*[1]										
East Midlands	2·3	2·4	3·2	7·2	8·8	8·2	3·8	4·4	8·4	7·1
Northern	135·2	122·4	117·5	143·9	127·2	101·3	89·0	67·3	102·2	61·7
North West	64·3	58·7	105·7	143·4	97·3	83·0	79·9	62·1	101·3	45·7
South West	6·0	5·0	8·5	10·3	11·0	7·8	9·5	8·6	15·3	7·0
West Midlands	0·1	neg	0·1	neg	0·1	—	—	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	30·2	21·5	38·7	47·1	36·4	23·5	26·8	24·2	27·1	17·8
England[2]	238·1	210·0	273·8	351·8	280·7	223·8	209·1	166·5	254·3	139·3
2. *Regional selective assistance*										
East Midlands	0·7	0·9	0·6	1·0	4·2	8·7	6·4	3·9	2·2	2·3
Northern	10·7	11·5	15·6	22·6	21·1	15·4	15·3	16·2	18·1	24·7
North West	40·1	23·3	19·3	14·6	18·3	13·6	13·7	12·7	18·4	19·6
South West	2·4	2·7	2·5	1·7	2·7	2·0	2·1	2·5	5·2	4·3
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5·5	9·8	18·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	5·2	6·8	6·6	7·1	10·6	8·8	9·7	8·3	10·1	14·1
England[3]	59·1	46·7	48·6	54·4	68·7	62·2	72·9	74·8	100·6	122·9

Expenditure at constant (1987-88 = 100) prices

3. *Regional development grants*[1]										
East Midlands	4·7	4·2	4·7	9·7	11·1	9·9	4·4	4·8	8·8	7·1
Northern	276·5	214·4	173·6	193·7	160·0	121·8	101·9	73·1	107·4	61·7
North West	131·5	102·8	156·1	193·0	122·4	99·8	91·5	67·4	106·4	45·7
South West	12·3	8·8	12·6	13·0	13·8	9·4	10·9	9·3	16·1	7·0
West Midlands	0·2	neg	0·1	neg	0·1	—	—	—	—	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	62·8	37·7	57·2	63·4	45·8	28·2	30·7	26·3	28·5	17·8
England[2]	486·9	367·8	404·4	473·5	353·1	269·0	239·5	180·8	267·1	139·3
4. *Regional selective assistance*										
East Midlands	1·4	1·6	0·9	1·3	5·3	10·5	7·3	4·2	2·3	2·3
Northern	21·8	20·1	23·0	30·4	26·5	18·5	17·5	17·6	19·3	24·7
North West	82·0	40·8	28·5	19·7	23·0	16·3	15·7	13·8	19·3	19·6
South West	4·9	4·7	3·7	2·3	3·4	2·4	2·4	2·1	5·5	4·3
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6·0	10·3	18·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	10·6	11·9	9·7	9·6	13·3	10·6	11·1	9·0	10·6	14·1
England[3]	120·9	81·8	71·8	73·2	86·4	74·8	83·5	81·2	105·7	122·9

Notes:

[1] RDG figures cover expenditure under the original and revised schemes.

[2] Totals do not always equal component parts due to rounding.

[3] At the regional level RSA figures include only industrial and training grants: England figures include some unallocated project grants and expenditure under the business improvement services and exchange risk guarantee schemes. Expenditure under these two schemes cannot be broken down to the regional level.

The provisional gross outturn for RDG for England as a whole in 1988-89 is £155 million at current prices, £144 million at constant 1987-88 prices; and for RSA £135 million (current), £126 million (constant).

The planned provision (net of domestic receipts) for RDG and RSA in the period 1989-90 to 1991-92 is as follows:

	1989-90[1] *£ million*	*1990-91*[2] *£ million*	*1991-92*[2] *£ million*
Planned provision at current prices			
Regional development grants	125	110	55
Regional selective assistance[3]	145	150	160
Planned provision at constant prices			
Regional development grants	111	93	45
Regional selective assistance[3]	128	127	132

[1] Supply estimates.
[2] As underlying the 1989 public expenditure White Paper.
[3] Includes expenditure on industrial and training grants, and the business improvement services and exchange risk guarantee schemes.

Petrol Sales

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether, in the light of the absence of a breakdown of United Kingdom petrol sales by company type, he will refer the industry to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Maude: The Director General of Fair Trading referred the wholesale supply of petrol in the United Kingdom to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on 9 November 1988. The commission was given 12 months in which to report.

Rating Reform (Royal Mail)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what restrictions are there on the use of the words "Royal Mail" in marketing services in relation to the implementation of the community charge.

Mr. Forth: Only standard services currently offered by the Post Office to any of its customers are being offered to local authorities to assist them in the implementation of the community charge. Royal Mail Letters, like Royal Mail Parcels, uses the words Royal Mail in marketing these standard services.

Mr. Anthony Wheeler and Mr. Richard Savill

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, whether any of his Department's officials were in communication with *(a)* the police or *(b)* any statutory or regulatory body, prior to December 1986, with respect to the business affairs of Mr. Anthony Wheeler and Mr. Richard Savill in respect of *(a)* the Wessex Trust, *(b)* Selective Investment Brokers and *(c)* any other companies of which they were directors; what information his officials received concerning any of those individuals or brokers; and what action was taken in respect of them, and on what dates.

Mr. Maude: Selective Investment Brokers was a trading name used as part of the operation of the Wessex Trust, an unincorporated body. It is not the same entity as Selective Investment Brokers Ltd.

Before December 1986 my Department was in communication with the Director of Public Prosecutions about Wessex Trust and companies concerned in the affairs of the trust which included companies of which Mr. Wheeler was a director. It is not the practice to comment on the affairs of individual companies.

Persons concerned with the Wessex Trust are at present subject to criminal proceedings brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Manufacturing Statistics

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish import figures and import penetration figures from 1973 to date for manufacturing industries at SIC two-digit level.

Mr. Alan Clark: Data are available only for the years 1978 to 1987 inclusive. The information is given in the following tables:

Table A
Imports at current prices (£ million)

SIC	Class	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
21	Metalliferous ores extraction and preparation	686	758	733	738	628	799	837	907	716	749
22	Metal manufacturing	2,340	3,021	4,716	3,151	3,229	4,055	3,947	4,065	4,413	4,276
23	Extraction of minerals N.E.S.	1,070	1,462	1,364	991	1,031	1,427	1,435	1,544	1,789	1,674
24	Non-metallic mineral products	348	437	422	463	546	683	819	891	989	1,140
25	Chemical industry	2,757	3,462	3,302	3,818	4,430	5,331	6,542	7,034	7,311	8,358
26	Man-made fibres	222	263	233	255	284	322	346	383	420	471
31	Metal goods N.E.S.	600	718	768	741	880	1,030	1,246	1,380	1,519	1,778
32	Mechanical engineering	3,446	3,517	3,540	3,632	4,102	4,720	5,543	6,158	6,593	7,578
33	Office machinery and data processing equipment	984	1,205	1,265	1,489	1,934	2,767	3,827	4,213	4,230	5,098
34	Electrical and electronic engineering	2,420	2,898	3,139	3,984	4,871	6,038	7,309	8,246	8,732	10,018
35	Motor vehicles and their parts	2,714	3,854	3,233	3,369	4,505	5,772	6,058	6,963	8,178	9,058
36	Other transport equipment	1,114	1,362	2,173	1,769	2,054	2,146	2,534	3,035	2,889	3,212
37	Instrument engineering	686	757	772	881	988	1,195	1,401	1,503	1,617	1,696
41-42	Food, drink and tabacco	4,372	4,918	4,626	4,979	5,548	6,095	7,013	7,294	7,666	7,951
43	Textile industry	1,520	1,739	1,608	1,865	2,026	2,439	2,927	3,192	3,400	3,831
44	Leather and leather goods	182	265	202	220	227	272	348	406	420	499
45	Footwear and clothing industries	1,052	1,417	1,442	1,662	1,758	1,909	2,358	2,488	2,715	3,114
46	Timber and wooden furniture	1,175	1,456	1,324	1,389	1,488	1,981	2,186	2,124	2,383	2,751
47	Paper, printing and publishing	1,557	1,816	1,910	2,224	2,376	2,679	3,338	3,537	3,768	4,569
48	Rubber and plastics processing	695	858	849	951	1,126	1,412	1,653	1,895	2,180	2,652
49	Other manufacturing	903	1,165	1,607	1,544	1,311	1,465	1,713	1,300	1,589	1,646

Table B
Import penetration ratio

(Percentages)

SIC class	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
21 Metalliferous ores extraction and preparation	108	111	103	102	102	101	98	100	n/a	n/a
22 Metal manufacturing	25	27	29	25	28	31	37	39	43	42
23 Extraction of minerals N.E.S.	32	35	33	32	39	42	42	43	37	36
24 Non-metallic mineral products	9	10	9	9	10	11	12	13	13	16
25 Chemical industry	28	29	28	30	33	35	38	40	40	41
26 Man-made fibres	41	45	56	59	67	70	68	71	68	66
31 Metal goods N.E.S.	10	10	11	11	12	13	14	16	16	18
32 Mechanical engineering	32	29	29	32	31	32	34	36	37	38
33 Office machinery and data processing equipment	92	92	96	96	105	106	105	100	100	93
34 Electrical and electronic engineering	31	31	31	36	39	42	44	47	47	49
35 Motor vehicles and their parts	35	41	39	42	47	52	51	50	51	48
36 Other transport equipment	41	38	38	41	39	42	51	45	45	42
37 Instrument engineering	52	53	52	58	56	55	58	57	56	58
41-42 Food, drink and tobacco	18	18	16	16	16	17	18	18	18	18
43 Textile industry	31	33	34	39	39	41	44	44	45	47
44 Leather and leather goods	34	40	40	42	42	44	44	49	46	49
45 Footwear and clothing industries	26	29	29	33	33	33	36	35	36	39
46 Timber and wooden furniture	27	29	27	29	29	32	32	30	31	31
47 Paper, printing and publishing	19	19	19	20	19	20	21	21	21	22
48 Rubber and plastics processing	18	18	18	21	22	24	25	26	27	28
49 Other manufacturing	35	36	41	48	38	38	39	38	39	46

n/a—Not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish the export figures and export-sales ratios from 1973 to date for manufacturing industries at SIC two-digit level.

Mr. Alan Clark: Data are available only for the years 1978 to 1987 inclusive. The information is given in the following tables:

Table A
Exports at current prices

(£ million)

SIC Class	*1978*	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
21 Metalliferous ores extraction and preparation	67	91	39	42	41	34	36	36	73	17
22 Metal manufacturing	2,104	2,634	3,135	2,919	2,893	3,526	3,766	3,860	3,953	4,097
23 Extraction of minerals N.E.S.	818	1,045	1,288	795	888	1,158	1,356	1,209	1,554	1,648
24 Non-metallic mineral products	636	652	731	824	838	878	985	1,120	1,127	1,183
25 Chemical industry	3,969	4,601	5,104	5,531	6,077	6,949	8,273	9,471	9,617	10,539
26 Man-made fibres	304	361	373	305	300	376	419	435	416	422
31 Metal goods N.E.S.	859	901	996	960	1,006	969	1,093	1,218	1,180	1,287
32 Mechanical engineering	5,792	6,078	6,924	7,079	7,372	6,658	7,493	8,295	8,385	8,984
33 Office machinery and data processing equipment	770	967	1,095	1,056	1,332	1,821	2,787	3,543	3,344	4,211
34 Electrical and electronic engineering	3,117	3,170	3,663	3,942	4,537	5,004	5,909	7,025	7,414	7,993
35 Motor vehicles and their parts	3,048	3,136	3,230	3,277	3,212	3,248	3,563	4,066	4,076	5003
36 Other transport equipment	1,640	1,817	2,422	2,733	3,213	3,323	3,745	4,178	4,642	5,478
37 Instrument engineering	651	753	874	918	1,024	1,013	1,133	1,194	1,230	1,346
41/42 Food, drink and tobacco	2,419	2,480	2,772	2,929	3,182	3,489	3,695	4,058	4,161	4,741
43 Textile industry	1,250	1,332	1,382	1,317	1,321	1,380	1,621	1,859	1,855	2,069
44 Leather and leather goods	128	162	141	131	150	175	232	260	273	345
45 Footwear and clothing industries	735	835	872	880	848	889	1,041	1,165	1,210	1,405
46 Timber and wooden furniture	279	279	292	272	293	311	358	397	380	416
47 Paper, printing and publishing	783	869	965	984	1,065	1,183	1,465	1,620	1,704	2,004
48 Rubber and plastics processing	849	946	1,137	1,113	1,117	1,212	1,369	1,522	1,646	1,974
49 Other manufacturing	764	1,010	1,255	954	909	1,018	1,222	1,051	1,195	1,303

Table B
Export sales ratio (percentages)

SIC	Class	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
21	Metalliferous ores extraction and preparation	391	556	257	163	154	145	70	95	..	..
22	Metal manufacturing	21	22	21	22	23	25	32	34	38	41
23	Extraction of minerals N.E.S.	25	29	28	28	14	13	13	13	9	12
24	Non-metallic mineral products	15	14	14	13	14	14	14	15	15	17
25	Chemical industry	36	35	37	39	40	41	44	47	47	46
26	Man-made fibres	49	53	67	63	69	74	72	73	68	64
31	Metal goods N.E.S.	13	12	14	14	14	12	13	14	13	13
32	Mechanical engineering	44	42	45	47	45	40	42	43	42	42
33	Office machinery and data processing equipment	90	90	96	94	108	110	107	100	100	91
34	Electrical and electronic engineering	37	33	34	36	38	37	39	43	43	43
35	Motor vehicles and their parts	38	36	38	41	38	37	37	37	34	34
36	Other transport equipment	45	43	42	50	53	55	63	55	59	57
37	Instrument engineering	51	53	55	59	56	51	53	50	48	52
41-42	Food, drink and tobacco	11	10	10	10	10	10	10	11	11	12
43	Textile industry	27	27	30	30	29	28	30	31	30	32
44	Leather and leather goods	26	29	32	30	32	33	35	38	36	40
45	Footwear and clothing industries	18	18	19	20	18	18	18	19	18	21
46	Timber and wooden furniture	7	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	5	5
47	Paper, printing and publishing	11	10	10	10	10	10	10	11	11	11
48	Rubber and plastics processing	21	20	23	24	22	22	22	22	21	22
49	Other manufacturing	38	36	36	38	28	28	28	28	28	34

.. = not available.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish manufacturing output figures in constant prices from 1973 to date at SIC two-digit level.

Mr. Atkins: The information is in the following table:

Index of production (1985 = 100)

SIC	Class	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
21	Metalliferous ores extraction and preparation	180	136	146	145	160	127	119	70	83	84	81	99	100	88	80	76
22	Metal manufacturing	138	126	109	115	114	114	118	91	97	94	94	93	100	101	109	122
23	Extraction of minerals N.E.S.	148	138	123	118	117	110	108	95	85	99	92	98	100	101	104	109
24	Non-metallic mineral products	136	127	119	117	115	116	115	104	93	93	98	101	100	102	108	119
25	Chemical industry	81	86	77	87	90	91	93	84	84	85	91	97	100	102	109	114
26	Man-made fibres	226	194	175	193	172	184	176	129	109	87	101	105	100	104	110	107
31	Metal goods N.E.S.	143	138	125	126	130	125	123	101	93	94	96	104	100	99	103	110
32	Mechanical engineering	125	133	131	125	125	122	117	108	96	98	94	96	100	97	97	106
33	Office machinery and data processing equipment	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
34	Electrical and electronic engineering	87	90	85	84	86	89	88	85	81	84	89	97	100	102	104	111
35	Motor vehicles and their parts	158	146	132	133	144	136	133	115	95	92	96	95	100	98	105	117
36	Other transport equipment	110	112	107	103	98	103	100	108	112	109	103	100	100	104	112	108
37	Instrument engineering	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
41-42	Food, drink and tobacco	95	94	92	95	96	98	100	99	97	99	100	101	100	101	103	106
43	Textile industry	152	139	128	132	133	129	124	102	94	92	94	96	100	100	105	102
44	Leather and leather goods	157	145	148	153	147	144	125	99	92	87	97	103	100	107	109	100
45	Footwear and clothing industries	101	99	99	96	101	104	106	95	88	88	91	95	100	101	102	102
46	Timber and wooden furniture	137	117	115	118	110	114	116	100	90	88	96	101	100	103	112	127
47	Paper, printing and publishing	111	111	96	99	103	105	109	101	96	93	93	98	100	104	114	126
48	Rubber and plastics processing	97	94	86	94	99	102	104	93	85	85	92	97	100	107	120	130
49	Other manufacturing	161	158	144	152	166	167	158	126	114	106	94	99	100	101	102	113

n.a. Not available.

Waste Paper Imports

Mr. Crowther: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has as to whether waste paper subsidised by Government funds, collected in the United States of America, is being imported into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: I understand that mandatory collection of waste paper and other recyclable materials is now in operation in several states of the United States of America. It is not possible separately to identify the volumes of waste paper obtained by this route and subsequently exported to the United Kingdom. However, there is currently no evidence that imports of waste paper from the United States of America into the United Kingdom are having an adverse effect on our domestic market.

Pittard Garnar plc

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to receive the report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the proposed takeover of Pittard Garnar plc by *(a)* Strong and Fisher (Holdings) plc. and *(b)* Hillsdown Holdings plc.

Mr. Maude: The Monopolies and Mergers Commission submitted its separate reports on the respective proposed acquisition of Pittard Garnar plc, by Strong and Fisher

(Holdings) plc and Hillsdown Holdings plc to my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 10 March 1989.

Companies Registration Office

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, since computerisation of search facilities at Companies Registration Office *(a)* how many times the computers have gone down, *(b)* what is the average time the computers have been down and *(c)* what is the longest and shortest time the computers have been down.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive of Companies Ho[illegible] tells me that, since the computerised search facilities were established on 19 September 1988, there have been four instances when the computer has gone down. However, other factors such as failure in data communications links have also, from time to time, resulted in the loss of the search service.

Altogether there have been 35 incidents which have resulted in some or all of the search room computer terminals being inoperable. The average duration of each incident has been 49 minutes. The longest interruption, lasting 6½ hours and caused by a simultaneous failure in a primary and standby communications link, affected only the terminals in the London search room. The shortest recorded incident lasted 10 minutes.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether there are any plans to provide back up computer facilities for when the Companies Registration Office computer search system goes down.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive attaches great importance to maximising the availability of computerised services and ways of reducing the risk of failure of all elements of the service are kept constantly under review. Currently, steps being taken to provide increased protection against computer failure include the installation of a second mainframe processor to provide back-up for the primary machine. Plans are also being prepared to enable the agency's computerised systems to be transferred to my Department's computer installation in Middlesex in the event of a major disaster at the agency's own computer installation.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the average delay before documents received at Companies Registration Office are available on microfiche; and what steps are being taken by the Companies Registration Office to reduce the delay.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive of Companies House tells me that the average delay for making documents available for public inspection on microfiche over the 51 weeks of 1988-89 to the 24 March has been 25 working days. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 23 March 1989 targets for Companies House including one for an improvement in the time taken to process documents to an average 18 working days during 1990-91. Under the new agency arrangements, it is for the chief executive to take steps to meet this target.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects the BAA shareholder register received by the Companies Registration Office on 30 September 1988, to be available for public inspection on microfiche.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive tells me that this register was received by him in computer output microfilm form from which it was not possible to take good quality microfiche copies in the usual way. However, it has been available for inspection in Cardiff from 30 September. If a London searcher had wished to inspect it I understand that arrangements could have been made. The chief executive's staff has, as a result of the hon. Member's interest, been experimenting with a number of alternative ways of providing a copy to the London office and I am pleased to say that they have now found a technique that will enable them to do so. This shareholders register is now therefore available for inspection on request at the London search room.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much it costs to produce the average company microfiche at Companies Registration Office.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive of Companies House tells me that, on a memorandum trading account basis, the estimated average cost of producing a company record on microfiche in 1988-89 was £2·46.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what were the staffing levels at *(a)* Companies Registration Office, Cardiff and *(b)* Companies Registration Office, London, for the period 1979 to 1988.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive Companies House tells me that at 1 April each year the numbers of permanent staff in post were as follows:

	Cardiff	*London*
1979	866·5	224
1980	828·5	204·5
1981	770·5	213
1982	772	196
1983	766	193
1984	768·5	181·5
1985	853	180·5
1986	857	181·5
1987	851·5	189
1988	795	178

Company Documents

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what charges are made by the United Kingdom and each EEC country to the public for inspecting documents relating to companies and what they obtain for their money.

Mr. Maude: The chief executive of Companies House tells me that, in Great Britain, a searcher receives for the £2·50 statutory inspection fee, a microfiche copy of the filmed contents of one company record held by the registrar. Historical documents not filmed may be inspected by arrangement at one of the search rooms within the same search fee.

Under the provisions of the first council directive dated 9 March 1968, European Community member states are required to make available for inspection company information for a fee which does not exceed the administrative cost of providing it.

The system of company searches throughout EC member states varies considerably and complete up-to-date information about all search facilities is not currently held. The chief executive has in hand a project to consider

closer working links with providers of company registration and search facilities throughout the European Community. Meantime, if the hon. Member has any particular point in mind, the chief executive would be pleased to consider what he might do to help.

Unsecured Loans

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of the respondents to the Office of Fair Trading survey published last autumn understood unprompted that an unsecured loan could result in the loss of the borrower's home.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The Office of Fair Trading, following the survey "Consumers' Use of Credit", has not published the proportion of respondents who, unprompted, understood that an unsecured loan could result in the loss of the borrower's home. However the survey did show that 44 per cent. of respondents claimed to have no idea of the difference between a secured loan and an unsecured loan.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster why he does not propose to include unsecured loans in regulations under the Consumer Credit Act 1974, requiring advertisements for loans to carry a health warning.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Evidence suggests that many consumers do not understand the difference between a secured loan and an unsecured loan. The report of the review body on civil justice (Cm. 394), concluded that sales of property following the granting of a charging order very rarely took place. I do not believe therefore that there is any justification for extending a "health" warning to cover unsecured loans.

Loans

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what proportion of loans secured against a second mortgage resulted in repossession of the borrower's home in the last year for which figures are available;

(2) what proportion of unsecured loans resulted in repossession of the borrower's home in the last year for which figures are available;

(3) how many charging orders for unsecured loans were issued in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The collection of statistics on court proceedings is a matter for the Lord Chancellor's Department, but I understand that information is not available in the form requested.

WALES

House Grants

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what income level it is his policy to set as the figure below which a house owner will receive a 100 per cent. grant for renovations or repairs, and what percentage grant will be received by those with incomes over the threshold.

Mr. Grist: Our recent consultation paper on the test of resources proposed that households with weekly net incomes below a threshold figure would qualify for 100 per cent. assistance. Grant would be progressively reduced for households with incomes above the threshold.

The test of resources we have proposed suggests that the threshold should be set at housing benefit level plus a premium of £20 per week. For those with incomes above that level we have proposed a sliding scale of grant entitlement determined by the cost of works and applicant's financial resources.

Forestry Commission Holdings (Wales)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information his office holds on the location and extent of the Forestry Commission's holdings in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information on the land managed by the Forestry Commission in Wales, set out by forest districts, is contained in table 16 of the commission's annual reports.

Copies of these reports are in the Library of the House.

Housing and Development Agencies

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the chairman and members of *(a)* the Land Authority for Wales, *(b)* Housing for Wales, *(c)* the Welsh Development Agency and *(d)* Cardiff Bay development corporation, together with their salaries and expenses.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The list of names and current salaries is given in the table. Expenses are paid in accordance with Treasury guidelines on payments to members of public bodies.

(a) Land authority for Wales

Membership		*Salaries* £
Chairman:	Mr. G. D. Inkin	[1]24,008
Deputy Chairman:	Mr. J. D. Allen CBE	[2]6,816
Members:	Mr. R. P. V. Rees	[3]4,790
	Mr. G. Jones	
	Mr. R. F. Watkiss CBE	
	Mr. W. Rhys Webb	
	Mr. R. G. Owen	
	Mr. A. Edmunds	

[1] Based on 2·5 days per week.
[2] Based on 1 day per week.
[3] Based on 3 days per month.

(b) Housing for Wales

Membership		*Salaries* £
Chairman:	Mr. J. Allen CBE	[1]22,135
Deputy Chairman:	Mr. J. Evans	[2]6,851
Members:	Mr. G. Lloyd	[3]3,000
	Professor P. Williams	
	Mr. J. Proctor	
	Mrs. A. Mainwaring	
	Mr. A. E. Peat	[4]—

[1] Based on 2·5 days per week.
[2] Based on 1 day per week.
[3] Based on 2 days per month.
[4] Salary paid as Chief Executive.

(c) Welsh Development Agency

Members		*Salaries* £
Chairman:	Dr. Gwyn Jones	[1]32,990
Deputy Chairman:	Sir Donald Walters	[2]17,046
Members:	Mr. David Waterstone	[4]—
	Cllr. E. Glyn Davies	[5]—
	Mr. Idwal Symonds JP	[3]4,825
	Mr. Colin Ivor Cooke	
	Mr. Ralph Phillip Vinon Rees	
	Mr. David Griffiths Roberts OBE	
	Mr. David Claude Neville Cole CBE	
	Mr. B. Hugh R. Hudson-Davies	
	Mr. John Foley MBE	

[1] Based on 2·5 days per week.
[2] Based on 2 days per week.
[3] Based on 2 days per month.
[4] Salary paid as Chief Executive of Agency.
[5] As Chairman of Development Board of Rural Wales receives no emoluments in his capacity as an ex officio board member of the Agency.

(d) Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Members		*Salaries* £
Chairman:	Geoffrey Inkin OBE	[1]24,290
Deputy Chairman:	Cllr. Lord Brooks of Tremorfa	[2]13,702
Members:	Mrs. Mair Barnes	[3]3,866
	Mrs. Honor Chapman	
	Cllor. Percy Chappel	
	Mr. Alan Cox CBE	
	Sir Alex Gordon	
	Mr. B. Hugh R. Hudson-Davies	
	Cllr. Paddy Kitson	
	Mr. Patrick de Pelet	
	Cllr. John Reynolds	
	Cllr. Ron Watkiss	

[1] Based on 2·5 days per week.
[2] Based on 2 days per week.
[3] Based on 0·5 day per week.

Cefn Coed Hospital (Psychiatric Unit)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when a medium-secure psychiatic unit at Cefn Coed hospital, Swansea will be established in the light of the undertaking given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 25 April 1988, *Official Report*, column 1.

Mr. Grist: The provision of a medium secure psychiatric service for south-west Wales is under consideration by the Welsh Office in the light of the comments of the three health authorities most concerned.

Housing for Wales

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has appointed any members of Housing for Wales who possess a local government background.

Mr. Grist: No.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount spent by his Department in

1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The total amount spent on management and computer consultancies in 1988 was £195,280. Details of those consultancies awarded in that year are as follows:

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
BIS Ltd.	To assist with the performance of the Department's mainframe computer.
HMSO	To review the layout of the Department's reprographic unit.
Ernst and Whinney Ltd.	To advise on the implementation of the Department's computerised financial systems.
Frank Griffiths Associates	Review of purchasing
Touche Ross	Review of the NHS directorate

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount spent by the Welsh Development Agency in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Welsh Development Agency in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Development Agency has spent £99,000 on the following consultancy contracts:

Company	*Assignment*
Grant Thornton	Evaluation and testing of new computer systems
Ernst Whinney	Documentation for users of new computer systems and advice on implementing new systems
P. Sullivan	Development of integrated data bases from existing computer systems
Touche Ross	Corporate planning advice
Numbers Research Ltd.	Monitoring effectiveness of agency marketing campaign outside of Wales
Henry Zarb of Holder & Co.	
Beaufort Research Ltd.	Monitoring effectiveness of agency marketing campaign within Wales
Taylor Nelson Research	Monitoring effectiveness of agency food initiative marketing campaign

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many tree preservation orders have been made in each county of Wales *(a)* for individual trees and *(b)* for groups of trees or woods; and what area is covered by the latter case.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Local planning authorities are responsible for making and confirming tree preservation orders and the information requested is not held centrally.

All-Wales Strategy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the number and designation of staff employed through all-Wales strategy funding in Clwyd since the inception of the strategy, on a year-by-year basis;

(2) how much all-Wales strategy funding Clwyd county council has allocated to its education service.

Mr. Grist: The responsibility for planning and developing services under the all-Wales mental handicap strategy lies with county joint planning teams. These teams consist of representatives of local and health authorities, voluntary organisations and representatives of service users in each county, and are co-ordinated by local authority social services departments. In addition to the resources of the local and health authorities, special Welsh Office grants are made available to counties to assist in the development of new patterns of services. Detailed information on individual services, including staffing, in Clwyd is available from the county council.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what voluntary sector initiatives are funded by the all-Wales strategy county by county; and what percentage of the counties allocations this represents on a year-by-year basis.

Mr. Grist: The allocation of funds under the all-Wales mental handicap strategy for the voluntary sector within each county is primarily a matter for the social services and health authorities, and detailed information is not held centrally. The Department funds directly a limited number of voluntary bodies for them to provide or pilot services relevant to more than one county area. Information in respect of these is as follows:

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
(a) Welsh Office direct funding of voluntary organisations	231,043	413,938	601,796	465,335	260,110	140,231
(b) Total Welsh Office payment under the mental handicap strategy	0·75 million	2·41 million	4·02 million	6·88 million	10·06 million	[1]13·80 million
Proportion of *(a)* to *(b)*	28·4 per cent.	17·2 per cent.	15·0 per cent.	6·8 per cent.	2·6 per cent.	1·0 per cent.

[1] Provisional.

The declining proportion of direct central funding reflects the development of effective county planning, which provides the basis for the social services and health authorities to support directly relevant voluntary sector activity.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what, at the latest available date, was the average selling price before discount of a local authority unit of accommodation; and what is the average cost of building a new local authority unit of accommodation.

Mr. Grist: The average selling price before discount of local authority dwellings sold during 1988 was £20,115. The average cost of building a new local authority unit of accommodation during the same period is estimated to have been £35,450.

Water Standards

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will provide details of the Welsh water authority's funding allocated to improvements in standards of *(a)* drinking water quality, *(b)* sewage treatment and disposal and *(c)* bathing water quality through its existing capital programme for each of the next 10 years;

(2) what percentage of the projected necessary funding for improvements in standards of *(a)* drinking water quality, *(b)* sewage treatment and disposal and *(c)* bathing water quality is contained within the existing capital programme of the Welsh water authority.

Mr. Grist: The information requested by the hon. Gentleman is not available.

ENERGY

Nuclear Power (Report)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *40*, what analysis has been made of the report, "Greenhouse Warming: A Rationale for Nuclear Power"; what action he proposes to take as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The paper "Greenhouse Warming: Comparative Analysis of Two Abatement Strategies" has been examined by my Department. The paper is United States oriented. The scope for cost-effective energy efficiency measures and the means by which they might be implemented are not sufficiently addressed.

Nuclear power has a positive role to play in helping to curtail future CO2 emissions, but is not going to solve the threat of global warming on its own. Cost-effective energy efficiency measures will also have an important role and the Energy Efficiency Office will continue to promote them vigorously.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department spent £217,000 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, in the financial year 1988-89.

Contracts placed with private sector firms and companies for management or computer consultancies during 1988 were:

Consultants	*Subject*
Price Waterhouse	Offshore supplies office: computerisation project
Dataserv	Computerisation of petroleum licence records
BIS	Cabling design for new HQ building
Price Waterhouse	Feasibility Study of computerisation of offshore drilling applications and approvals
IML	Assistance in setting up computer system for technical investigation into Piper Alpha disaster
Price Waterhouse	Reporting instructions for United Kingdom oil and gas production statistics
Data Solve Ltd.	Computer training
Stuart McKechnie Ltd.	Management training
Training and Development Approaches Ltd.	Advice on management training and appraisal
Kleinwort Benson	Financial advice including computer modelling
Russell Reynolds	Recruitment consultants for chairman of North Eastern electricity board

Security Firms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his policy towards his Department's involvement with private security firms.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The policy of my Department is to use the services of private security firms where it is to the public advantage to do so, within the limits set by Government policy and after consulting other Departments as appropriate.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Parent Governors

10. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have set up governing bodies containing elected parent governors; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: A recent survey for the Department suggests that about 99 per cent. of parent-governor places at county and maintained special schools have been filled, almost all of these through election or nomination. This is a tremendous achievement.

Student Loans

16. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will estimate at what date the Government will recover its spending outlay on the student loans scheme proposed in the White Paper "Top-up Loans for Students".

Mr. Jackson: On the basis of the assumptions outlined in annex E of the White Paper and measured in terms of the cumulative net PSBR effect, the spending outlay will be recovered by 2013. If the cost of the access funds are included, the outlay will be recovered by 2015.

25. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the number of representations he has received for and against the Government's students loan plans.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend on 22 March 1989 to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) at column *605*.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what effect his proposals laid down in "Top-Up Loans for Students" (Cm. 520) will have in relation to *(a)* nursing students pursuing degree courses in nursing in colleges of higher education and *(b)* nursing students pursuing nursing education courses under the Project 2000 proposals, in receipt of a bursary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The precise arrangements for bursaries for student nurses have not yet been decided.

Education Statistics

17. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what analysis he has carried out of the 10 local education authorities with the lowest record of (i) examination results and (ii) expenditure per pupil.

Mrs. Rumbold: Three of the 10 highest spending authorities in 1986-87 were among the 10 authorities with the lowest proportions of school leavers achieving five or more higher grades. None of the 10 lowest spending authorities were in this category.

Drugs

18. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for Government funding of drugs education co-ordinators.

Mr. Butcher: Drugs education co-ordinators are employed by local education authorities; they have been funded jointly by LEAs and the DES since 1986 under the education support grants programme. Consideration is currently being given to the nature of the ESG programme in 1990-91. A decision on this will be announced shortly.

Japanese Language Training

19. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of state for Education and Science what progress is being made in expanding the demand for the network of language export training centres' Japanese services; and what other steps he is taking to enhance Japanese language training for exporters.

Mr. Jackson: The network of language export centres is planning to produce an audio briefing package which will enhance its Japanese services. The package will include Japanese language training as well as advice on business practice in Japan. It will be aimed at businesses wishing to penetrate the Japanese market and should be available from all the centres in the early summer.

Classroom Behaviour

20. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps his Department is taking to assist schools in securing a more orderly atmosphere in the classroom.

Mr. Butcher: My Department is currently taking action on a number of key recommendations made in the recent report from the committee of inquiry into discipline in schools. This includes measures to improve teacher training; financial support for projects to tackle the problems of difficult pupils and truancy; and close monitoring of the procedures for excluding pupils from school. Fuller details were given to the House on 13 March by my right hon. Friend.

Grant Maintained Schools

21. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of schools which have so far applied for grant-maintained status; and what action he intends to take to encourage further applications.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of 22 schools have so far published statutory proposals to become grant-maintained; many more are on the way. My right hon. Friend will continue to do all he can to encourage the development of a healthy grant-maintained sector and greater choice for parents.

Schools Outreach Programme

22. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the funding of the schools outreach programme.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend has offered funding for a three-year pilot project to be conducted by schools outreach. This is dependent upon funding also being provided by a local education authority. In the long term, funding for schools outreach must be a matter for local determination.

Student Loans

23. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received any representations from banking institutions in the last month in regard to the proposed introduction of student loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Yes. Constructive discussions are being held with a range of financial institutions about their possible participation in the administration of top-up loans.

Parent Governors

24. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the latest figures for the number of parents who have become school governors.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind).

Essex Education Committee

26. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of Essex county council education committee; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Butcher: My right hon. Friend last met the chairman of the Essex county council education committee on official business at the golden jubilee celebrations of St. Helena school on 28 January 1988.

Engineering (A-level Syllabus)

27. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how many examination boards provide an A-level examination syllabus for engineering.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that seven of the eight GCE examining boards offer A-level syllabuses in engineering subjects.

Capital Allocations

28. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities have made representations to his Department since the 1989-90 capital allocations were announced.

Mr. Butcher: A total of 17 local education authorities have made representations about their 1989-90 capital allocations. Four of these relate to the allocations for voluntary aided and special agreement schools only.

Lecturers (Dispute)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provisions are being made for Liverpool students whose exams are in danger because of the Association of University Teachers' dispute.

Mr. Jackson: That is a matter for the authorities at the university.

Lecturers (Pay and Conditions)

Mr. David Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about university lecturers' pay and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has received representations from the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Association of University Teachers seeking additional funding for pay increases for university staff. He has also had many letters both about salary levels in universities and in criticism of the boycott of examination work by lecturers.

Student Maintenance

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give figures for total Government spending on student maintenance for each of the last 10 years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* in real terms, indexed so that 1979-80 = 100.

Mr. Jackson: Expenditure on the maintenance element of mandatory awards has been as follows:

Academic year	*(a) Expenditure in cash terms £m*	*(b) Expenditure in real terms £m (1979-80 prices)*
1979-80	332	332
1980-81	398	349
1981-82	443	355
1982-83	472	359
1983-84	502	362
1984-85	480	332
1985-86	458	302
1986-87	480	302
1987-88[1]	497	295
1988-89[1]	523	292

[1] Estimated.

Polytechnics and Colleges

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1), pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Oxford, East, *Official Report*, 15 March, column *219*, if he will list the separate figures for the total capital allocations from the advanced further education pool and capital expenditure by local authorities on polytechnics and colleges in each year since 1979-80 *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* indexed in real terms with 1979-80 = 100;

(2) pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Oxford East, *Official Report*, 15 March, column *220*, if he will list capital expenditure *(a)* funded by the University Grants Committee, and *(b)* the same figures for capital expenditure on polytechnics and other colleges for each of the last 10 years in cash terms, as well as indexed in real terms with 1979-80 = 100.

Mr. Jackson: The following information takes account of the gross domestic product deflator updated as at 15 March and also corrects an error in the earlier answer, for which I apologise, in the index for polytechnics and colleges in 1987-88.

Capital Expenditure on Financial years	*Universities (Great Britain)*		*Polytechnics and other Colleges (England)*	
	£ million	*Index*	*£ million*	*Index*
1979-80	87·8	100	78·0	100
1980-81	97·9	94	100·7	109
1981-82	103·1	90	99·9	98
1982-83	106·8	87	125·5	115
1983-84	103·1	81	125·5	110
1984-85	106·7	79	137·4	115
1985-86	118·2	83	145·5	116
1986-87	130·2	89	159·5	123
1987-88	128·8	84	[1]124·9	[1]91
1988-89	140·1	85	n/a	n/a

[1] Estimated.
n/a Not available.

The figures for polytechnics and colleges are gross capital expenditure on all further and higher education by local authorities as returned by them together with capital grants to voluntary and direct grant colleges. The advanced further education pool is for recurrent expenditure only. There is a separate pool for elements of capital-related expenditure on AFE as laid down by regulations.

Teacher Conversion Courses

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for what reasons the allocation of funds to the University Grants Committee and National Advisory Board for teacher conversion courses has been discontinued.

Mrs. Rumbold: The allocation of funds has not been discontinued.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many places were allocated for teacher conversion courses in 1987-88 and 1988-89; and how many of these places were taken up.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not available.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he or Ministers in his Department have held a meeting of the trustees of the grant-maintained schools trust.

Mrs. Rumbold: Neither I nor my Ministerial colleagues have held any such meeting. From time to time my right hon. Friend and I have had discussions with the chairman and director of the grant-maintained schools trust.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he first learnt that the grant-maintained schools trust had described itself in its literature as a registered charity; and if his Department took any action to point out the error.

Mrs. Rumbold: The point was brought to my right hon. Friend's attention some weeks after the issue of the document, when he was also informed that the grant-maintained schools trust was itself taking steps to correct the error.

Information Technology

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek to amend the education support grant guidelines governing information technology in schools to permit local education authorities freedom to purchase information technology equipment of their choice without restriction on the country of origin of the manufacturers.

Mr. Butcher: The guidelines contain no such restriction.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research his Department is currently funding into the development of a vaccine against bovine tuberculosis in badgers.

Mr. Jackson: This Department is not currently funding any such research.

Child Sexual Abuse

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what Government-funded research by the Economic and Social Research Council into the sexual abuse of children *(a)* has taken place since 1979, *(b)* is currently taking place and *(c)* is under consideration, giving the cost of each project listed.

Mr. Jackson: Since 1979 the Economic and Social Research Council has provided funds from its grant-in-aid in support of the following research projects relating to child sexual abuse:

1 January 1982 to 31 December 1983: £23,130 for a project entitled "The Social Sensitivity of Abused Children and Their Mothers", under the direction of Dr. C. E. Davies and Miss R. M. Calam, department of psychology, Manchester university.

1 April 1985 to 31 March 1987: £11,620 for a project entitled "A Social Anthropological Study of Cases of Child Sex Abuse in Britain", under the direction of Professor J. S. La fontaine, institute of child health, London university.

1 December 1988 to 30 November 1990: £49,490 for a project entitled "Child Sex Abuse", under the direction of Dr. N. G. Fielding and Ms. J. Tunstall, department of sociology, university of Surrey. [In progress].

1 January 1989 to 31 December 1990: £44,842 for a project entitled "The Effect of Social Worker/Family Relationships on Child Abuse Case Outcomes", under the direction of Dr. T. K. Pitcairn, department of social policy and social work, Edinburgh university. [In progress].

A further grant of £43,000 has recently been awarded to Dr. L. Kelly, polytechnic of north London, for a 20-month project to begin later this year, entitled "The Prevalence of Child Abuse in the UK". The council is giving consideration to the possibility of a new research initiative in this area.

Teachers (Statistics)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers are employed in schools in the state sector; and if he will break the figures down according to age and sex.

Mr. Butcher: The total number of teachers and instructors employed in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools sector in England in January 1988 (the latest date for which figues are available) was 425·5 thousand, including those employed part-time or on an occasional basis. Their total full-time equivalent was 401·5 thousand.

More detailed information by age and sex on the breakdown of teachers is available only in relation to qualified teachers in full-time regular service and at an earlier date (March 1986). The figures (in thousands) are:

	Men	*Women*	*Men and women*
Under 30	17·0	41·8	58·7
30-34	27·9	35·6	63·5
35-39	37·3	39·6	76·9
40-44	23·7	33·5	57·2
45-49	18·4	32·9	51·3
50-54	14·0	26·8	40·8
55 or over	11·7	16·8	28·6
All ages	150·0	226·9	376·9

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Butcher: This Department spent £438,127 on computer and management consultancies in 1988. Contracts awarded in that year were as follows:

Consultant	*Assignment*
Logica Ltd.	Technical study in connection with the Department's education information strategy
Logica Ltd.	Review of teacher information needs
Peat, Marwick McLintock	Study of requirements for an integrated vote and management accounting system
CMG	Specification of needs for the Department's core resource information system
BIS Applied Systems	Communications strategy for HMI
FI Group	Study of ORACLE implementation
Ernst Whinney	Management system for HMI travelling and subsistence
ITS Ltd.	Training review
Coopers and Lybrand	Study of holding board models for the ABRC
Coopers and Lybrand	Management framework for the control of information systems projects
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Advice on computer accounting systems for the Department
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Financial management advice and assistance to the University Grants Committee (UGC)
Loughborough Consultants Ltd.	Research selectivity project for the UGC
City University	Financial services for the UGC
Royal Society	Analysis of the earth science review for the UGC

Over-16s

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of young persons in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Durham continue in formal education beyond their 16th year.

Mr. Jackson: The available information is given in the table.

Participation in education, 1986-87

	Percentage of population			
	Age 16		*Age 17*	
	full-time	*part-time day*	*full-time*	*part-time day*
United Kingdom[1]	50	15	32	12
Durham[2]	39	15	26	14

[1] Home students only.
[2] Excludes independent schools and private further education establishments.

Higher Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of young persons in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Durham attend full-time higher education.

Mr. Jackson: The available data are listed below. The percentages are based on the numbers of students in 1986-87 who received a new full-value award from an LEA. Comparable figures are not available for the United Kingdom.

New full-value awards[1] to students as a percentage[2] of 18 to 19-year-old population: 1986-87

	Per cent.
Durham LEA	14·9
English and Welsh LEAs	21·3

[1] Includes awards made to students attending universities, polytechnics and other colleges.
[2] The percentage is based on the number of new award holders as a proportion of the relevant single year age group; this was calculated by adding half of all 18-year-olds to half of all 19-year-olds.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to encourage more students to enter full-time higher education.

Mr. Jackson: We already have record participation in all forms of higher education. The Government's policies for better schools and greater flexibility in further and higher education will build on this, helping to offset the effects of the substantial decline in the young entrant age group.

Students and Academic Staff

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) how many full-time students, undergraduates and post-graduates there were at universities studying *(a)* arts, *(b)* business, *(c)* science and *(d)* engineering for the years 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1988;

(2) how many full-time academic staff were employed by universities for art, business, science and engineering for the years 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1988.

Mr. Jackson: The information is shown in the table:

Full-time equivalent student load and full-time academic staff, in universities
Great Britain

	Academic year beginning in			
	1975[1,2]	*1980*[1]	*1985*	*1987*[3]
Full-time equivalent student load				
Total of which	272,865	311,985	307,741	318,496
Arts	128,897	146,367	129,669	135,569
Business	6,051	7,720	14,237	15,715
Science	91,376	102,224	106,110	108,083
Engineering	28,072	34,267	35,949	37,379
Other[5]	18,469	21,407	21,776	21,750
Full-time academic staff[4]				
Total of which	31,094	42,478	43,435	45,348
Arts	12,199	14,620	12,702	12,633
Business	576	852	1,275	1,395
Science	11,495	15,964	16,642	17,447
Engineering	3,480	5,042	5,731	6,058
Other[5]	3,344	6,000	7,085	7,815

[1] Information for 1975 and 1980 is based on subject group of academic department that for later years is based on cost centres.
[2] Information for academic staff in 1975 are full-time staff paid directly from university funds.
[3] Provisional.
[4] Excluding a small number of staff in adult education departments, libraries and museums. In 1987-88 these numbered 530.
[5] Clinical medicine, dentistry and veterinary science.

Licensed Teachers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will make a statement on his policy on providing financial support to local education authorities in *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990-91 in connection with his proposals to introduce licensed teachers; whether he has yet held any discussions about financial support arrangements for these proposals; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will describe the expenditure consequences of his present proposals to introduce licensed teachers, including an illustrative cost of training for one such teacher; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The cost of providing training for licensed teachers will vary considerably according to the previous experience and training needs of the individual concerned. The costs of such training will be eligible for support under the local education authority training grants scheme.

Pensions (Abatement Provisions)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bridgend of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *223*, what was the total number of notifications from teachers received by the Paymaster General's Office in the year ended 31 March 1988 concerning re-employment after retirement; in what circumstances individual cases among this total number were considered under the abatement provisions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Paymaster General's Office does not keep the detailed information requested but I understand that inquiries are received from some 2,000 teachers each year about re-employment after retirement. Individual cases are considered under the abatement provisions when the employment is of the kind to which the abatement provisions can apply and the income from it approaches the earnings margin.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bridgend of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *223*, whether the current review of the policy of abatement is taking account of the problems of teacher shortages identified by his Department; when he expects this review to reach a conclusion in relation to teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The review will take account of factors relating to recruitment and retention in all of the main public services including education. The review is expected to be completed this summer.

Voluntary Youth Workers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will reinstate eligibility for voluntary youth workers under the local authority training grant scheme.

Mr. Butcher: The eligibility of these workers is under review.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from the London residuary body in respect of the draft Education (Reorganisation in Inner London) (Compensation) Regulations 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Letters have been received from the chairman of the board of the London residuary body and from the LRB's director of personnel. These acknowledge that the terms proposed under the draft regulations are very similar to those available under the Local Government Reorganisation (Compensation) Regulations 1986, but make a number of suggestions for the most part reflecting the experience of the board in operating the 1986 regulations.

DEFENCE

Military Equipment (Export)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision is made by his Department for measuring and regulating the export of military equipment from the

United Kingdom through collaborative projects; what provision is made for measuring and regulating the re-export of this equipment to third countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Exports from the United Kingdom of goods controlled under the Exports of Goods (Control) Order 1987, as amended, are subject to export licensing in accordance with procedures operated by the Department of Trade and Industry.

There are no special provisions for collaborative projects; the same export requirements and procedures apply to them as to any other export of defence equipment.

In general, the export or re-export of collaborative equipment to third countries calls for the agreement of all the collaborative partners although each project has its own memorandum of understanding and procedures differ slightly between them.

Headquarters Contracts

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the precise amounts paid to each of the 10 contractors which received the largest shares of headquarters contracts awarded by his Department in each of the five years to 31 March 1988.

Mr. Sainsbury: The 10 contractors receiving the most payment in respect of headquarters contracts in the five years to 31 March 1988 were as follows:

	£ million
1983-84	
1. The General Electric Co plc	690
2. British Aerospace plc (Dynamics)	615
3. Rolls Royce Ltd	485
4. British Shipbuilders	400
5. The Plessey Co plc	365
6. Royal Ordnance Factories	340
7. British Aerospace plc (Aircraft)	340
8. Ferranti plc	180
9. The British Petroleum Co plc	170
10. Westland plc	155
1984-85	
1. The General Electric Co plc	805
2. British Aerospace plc (Dynamics)	685
3. British Shipbuilders	535
4. The Plessey Co plc	415
5. Royal Ordnance plc	410
6. Rolls Royce Ltd	410
7. British Aerospace plc (Aircraft)	320
8. Ferranti plc	215
9. Esso UK plc	205
10. British Petroleum Co plc	175
1985-86	
1. The General Electric Co plc	800
2. British Aerospace plc (Dynamics)	715
3. British Shipbuilders	590
4. The Plessey Co plc	440
5. Rolls Royce Ltd	435
6. Royal Ordnance plc	370
7. British Aerospace plc (Aircraft)	300
8. Ferranti plc	225
9. Westland plc	180
10. Hunting Associated Industries plc	160
1986-87	
1. The General Electric Co plc	850
2. British Aerospace plc (Dynamics)	610
3. Rolls Royce Ltd	425
4. The Plessey Co plc	365
5. Vickers Shipbuilders and Engineering	345
6. British Aerospace plc (Aircraft)	320
7. Royal Ordnance plc	245
8. Hunting Associated Industries plc	205
9. Ferranti plc	200
10. Thorn EMI plc	155
1987-88	
1. The General Electric Co plc	1,035
2. British Aerospace plc (Dynamics)	545
3. Vickers Shipbuilders and Engineering Ltd	465
4. Rolls Royce plc	420
5. British Aerospace plc (Aircraft)	330
6. The Plessey Co plc	305
7. Royal Ordnance plc	225
8. Devonport Management Ltd	225
9. Ferranti plc	200
10. Hunting Associated Industries plc	195

Contractors

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the precise amounts paid to each of the following contractors by his Department in the year ended 31 March 1988: *(a)* J. S. Chinn & Co. Ltd., *(b)* Abbey Panels Ltd., *(c)* Self Changing Gears Ltd., *(d)* Noel Penny Turbines Ltd. *(e)* National Plastics Ltd., *(f)* Commercial Hydraulics Keelavite Ltd., *(g)* Coventry Motor & Sundries Ltd. and *(h)* Armstrong Equipment plc.

Mr. Sainsbury: The payments made to each of these companies in the year ended 31 March 1988 in respect of headquarters contracts were as follows:

1987	£ million
J. S. Chinn & Co. Ltd.	0·06
Self Changing Gears Ltd.	0.40
Noel Penny Turbines Ltd.	0·04
National Plastics Ltd.	5·71
Commercial Hydraulics Keelavite	2·03
Coventry Motor & Sundries Ltd.	0·16

We have no record of any headquarters contracts having been placed with either Abbey Panels Ltd. or Armstrong Equipment plc.

Missiles

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current purchase costs of *(a)* one Exocet MM38 missile and *(b)* one Trident 2D5 missile.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is no longer our practice to publish unit production costs for equipment purchased by the Ministry of Defence.

Submarines

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what claims for damages caused to boats by submarines are currently being considered; what total sum is involved; and what sums have been paid for damages in each year since 1979 and for the current year to date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence deals on a legal liability basis with claims for compensation arising from incidents involving Royal Navy submarines. In each of the last 10 years, the following sums have been paid out as compensation:

Year	£
1979	750
1980	Nil
1981	Nil
1982	Nil
1983	2,800
1984	157,850
1985	236,100
1986	15,000
1987	100,400
1988	Nil

Four claims are currently being considered, the details of which are regarded as private between the claimants and the Department.

Vehicles

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current purchase costs of *(a)* one FV432 armoured personnel carrier and *(b)* one FV18067 ambulance (Rover ·75 tonne).

Mr. Sainsbury: It is no longer our practice to publish unit production costs. No recent purchases have, however, been made of either of these vehicles.

Multiple-launch Rocket System

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current purchase cost of one M270 multiple-launch rocket system.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is no longer our practice to publish unit production costs for equipment purchased by the Ministry of Defence.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Ministry of Defence is estimated to spend £8·5 million in the financial year 1988-89 on management and computer consultancy contracts. Details of the management consultancy contracts are listed. Contractual responsibility for computer consultancy contracts has been transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. CCTA does not currently maintain separate details of consultancy contracts, which, in many cases, form part of wider computer procurement and support contracts. Details of individual contracts could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Management consultancy contracts

Firm	Subject of assignment
Arthur Anderson & Co	Support to the RAF TOPMIS Team
W. S. Atkins & Partners	Support to the PE TOPMIS Team
W. S. Atkins & Partners	Assistance for the Defence Works Planning Team
Charles Barker plc	Implementation of the Internal Communications Strategy for DGA(N)
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Study into Spares Procurement
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Study into Spares Procurement
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Support to the Army TOPMIS Team
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Follow on Study into Initial Provisioning
P. A. Consulting Services Ltd	Study into the Long Term Support for Tri Star
P. A. Consulting Services Ltd	Study into the Management and Control of Consumable Air Stores
Peat Marwick McLintock	Study into the RN Representational Task
Peat Marwick McLintock	Support to the Navy TOPMIS Team
Peat Marwick McLintock	Study into Ethnic Minority Recruitment to the Armed Forces
P. E. Consulting Services Ltd	Support to the PE TOPMIS Team
Touche Ross & Company	Assistance with Financial Management in the DGA(N) Area
Touche Ross & Company	Assistance with Next Steps and the Meteorological Office
Touche Ross & Company	Assistance to the British Forces Germany Financial Scrutiny
Harold Whitehead & Partners	Review of Productivity Scheme
Harold Whitehead & Partners	Review of Productivity Scheme
Arthur Young	Study into EX Works Transport

United States Competitive Strategies Doctrine

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterparts regarding the new United States competitive strategies doctrine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has not recently discussed the subject of competitive strategies with his US counterparts.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer to the Member for Brent, East of 7 March, *Official Report*, column *517* *(a)* which private security firms have been used by his Department, *(b)* where they have been deployed and *(c)* at what cost to his Department in each year from 1979 to the current date.

Mr. Sainsbury: The following private companies have been employed by the Department to provide security guarding services:

Airwork Ltd
Burns International Security Services (UK) Ltd
Care Security Services Ltd.
Centuryan Security Ltd
Chubb Wardens Ltd
Custodian Security Guards Ltd
Medway (Chatham) Dock Co Ltd
Shorrock Guards Ltd (Formerly Pritchard Security Services Ltd)
RCO Contract Services Ltd
Reliance Security Services Ltd
Royal British Legion Attendants Co Ltd
Securiguard Services Ltd
Securi-Guard (SW)
Securicor Ltd
SERCO Ltd
Thorn EMI Electronics Ltd
UK Security Ltd

These firms have been employed at more than 30 establishments but it would not be in the interests of security to reveal their locations.

In addition, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. Hughes) on 23 March at column *761*.

Northern Ireland (Border Crossings)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East of 10 January, *Official Report*, column *541*, how many service personnel have *(a)* breached regulations governing off-duty soldiers crossing into the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* been dealt with by the service authorities, in each year from 1972 to the current date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Contractors

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *244*, how the prior agreement of his Department is sought by contractors wishing to employ persons with access to classified information.

Mr. Sainsbury: It would not be appropriate to give details.

Economic League

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East of 1 February, *Official Report*, column *244*, whether any speakers have been provided by the Economic League for training courses for military personnel in each year from 1979 to the current date.

Mr. Neubert: No record of guest speakers is held centrally and there is no requirement for permanent records to be maintained locally. However, inquiries have been made at staff colleges and other training establishments where guest speakers are regularly invited. The staff of those colleges and establishments have been unable to identify any invitations to the Economic League to provide speakers for their courses.

Army Operations (Forged Materials)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the use of forged materials in Army operations at home and abroad.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to comment on operational matters.

Keenie Meenie Services

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 9 February about Keenie Meenie Services and related matters.

Mr. Sainsbury: The letter was sent openly and is therefore in the public domain; the text is as follows:

Thank you for your letter of 23 January concerning my written reply to you of 15 December (Col. 684 of the Official Record).

In that reply I stated that I was not aware of any advertisements having been procured or placed in the Ministry of Defence publications by KMS and that remains the case.

The extracts you provided with your letter were from a brochure which was produced as a commercial venture by International Military Services Ltd. (IMS) in 1985. Although wholly owned by MOD, IMS is a private Limited company incorporated under the Companies Act and is a distinct and separate entity from MOD. In contracting for Defence Exports it adheres to Government policies and to guidelines issued by the MOD. But within these limitations it is free to pursue business and to take initiatives in exactly the same way as any other commercial company. It can be engaged by other private companies and on occasions by HMG in connection with contracts for the export of British defence equipment and associated services in the commercial environment.

The brochure concerned was entitled 'Internal Security —Counter Insurgency'. Entries were paid for by various advertisers as a means of publicising the services they offered. Presumably IMS at the time regarded the publication as a viable commercial venture but I understand that it was not a regular publication and has not reappeared since 1985. This was a matter for the commercial judgment of IMS and there is no suggestion that they in any way transgressed the guidelines under which they operate.

You also asked about the nature of the services provided by IMS to overseas armed forces and paramilitary organisations. This can and does cover a wide range of activities but it can be defined in general terms and in the

words of the pamphlet itself as the supply of military equipment and the provision of "associated support such as the installation, commissioning and maintenance of equipment and the training of personnel". I must emphasise that IMS works within the constraints of Government policies which in this field, as you know, take account of a wide range of political, security and humanitarian conditions.

MOD was not and did not expect to be involved in either the publication of the brochure by IMS or the placing of the KMS advertisement and there is therefore no question of correcting or amending the Official Record of my answer of 15 December 1988.

Guns

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current purchase costs of *(a)* one 9mm L34A1 sub machine gun and 34 round magazine, *(b)* one 5·56mm individual weapon L85 (Endeavour) and 30-round magazine and *(c)* one 12 bore, L32A1 automatic shotgun and five rounds.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is no longer our practice to publish unit production costs.

ENVIRONMENT

Government Cars

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many gallons of petrol were consumed for 1987 and 1988 by cars in the Government car pool.

Mr. Chope: Figures for the number of gallons of fuel consumed are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. But in 1987 the Government car service spent £190,317 on petrol. In 1988 that figure was £183,008 (both figures are exclusive of VAT).

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cars there are in the Government car pool; and how many of those use unleaded petrol.

Mr. Chope: The Government car service operate 181 vehicles. By the middle of this year we intend to have 128 vehicles capable of using unleaded petrol. At present 39 have this capability.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount spent by the Property Services Agency in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Property Services Agency in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Ridley: Expenditure by the Property Services Agency, on management and computer consultancy contracts in 1988, excluding hardware and software purchases, was £6,462,582.

The list of each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Property Services Agency in 1988, giving the name of each consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment, is as follows:

Consultancy Firm	*Subject of Assignment*
Management consultancy	
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd	To carry out an analysis of PSA financial and management accounting processes as they would be performed under a full commercial accounting regime.
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd	To examine the impact of existing IT systems relating to Directly Employed Labour (DEL) performance
Price Waterhouse	Business and Finance Development
Samuel Montagu and Co Ltd	Advice on effecting the sale of the Crown Suppliers
Write Solutions Ltd	Assistance with development of the marketing strategy for QEII Conference Centre
Michael Rines Associates	Public Relations Support for QEII Conference Centre
MCP Management Consultants	Software support
Farnfield Marketing Consultants Ltd	Establishing the sales potential of publications produced by PSA's Director General of Design Services
Duffy, Eley Giffone and Worthington	Impact of New Technology on Accommodation Standards
Peat Marwick McLintock	Assessment of tenders for contracting out management of maintenance and minor works activities
BIS Applied Systems Ltd	Support in the development of a Quality Support Framework
BIS Applied Systems Ltd	Support in the production of a statement of requirement for PSA's Regional Computing Standards
BIS Applied Systems Ltd	Support in the development of a Configuration Management Framework
Dialatron Business Systems Ltd	Evaluation, implementation and development of facilities on text processing equipment
Systems Designers plc	Software support
Oracle Corporation UK Ltd	Software support
Peat Marwick McLintock	Introduction of Low Cost 2-dimensional computer aided draughting (CAD) system
Dr Stanley Port	Support for General Draughting Management Study
ICL (UK) Ltd	Support for computer communications
Norbec (Microfilm) Ltd	Support for installation of microfilming system
BIS Applied Systems Ltd	Assistance in the review, development and evaluation of IT standards
ICL (UK) Ltd	Software support
ICL (UK) Ltd	Technical support to link computer operating systems
Computer Consultancy	
Applied Network Technology Ltd	Transfer of priority data from an Apple microcomputer to an IBM PC
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd	Evaluation of PC-based software for project management requirements
Peter Downes Ltd	To develop proposals for a comprehensive register of computing, telecoms and office machinery held by PSA

Consultancy Firm	Subject of Assignment
John Evans & Associates Ltd	Implementation of revised methods for planning and control of Directly Employed Labour
CAP Industry Ltd (SEMA Group)	Public Health Engineering Computerisation
Prime Computer (UK) Ltd	Software support
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd	Support to the planning of the Infrastructure Computer Services Project
BIS Applied Systems Ltd	Support in the evaluation of security requirements of PSA's Strategic Infrastructure
BIS Applied Systems Ltd	Support in the evaluation of the security requirements of PSA's Interim Systems and Central Hastings Processes
K P G Computer Support Services Ltd	Software support
Peat Marwick McLintock	Professional Computing Strategy Study
Metascybe Systems Ltd	Enhancement to financial control computer system
Digital Equipment Co. Ltd	Technical support to link computer operating systems
Digital Equipment Co. Ltd	Assistance in the procurement of IT equipment
ICL (UK) Ltd	Audit of accounting systems
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd	Evaluation of short-listed suppliers for computing equipment
ICL (UK) Ltd	Specialist support for accounting (LAFIS) software package

Sports Clubs

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with sporting associations and local authorities relating to mandatory and discretionary relief from non-domestic rates to sports clubs; and what guidance he has issued.

Mr. Ridley: My Department is issuing today a consultation letter on the content of proposed regulations about the period for which discretionary rate relief may be granted and the notice which must be given if relief is varied or terminated. I am placing a copy of the letter in the Library.

Also the Department has discussed with the local authority associations and with the Sports Council what guidance should be given to local authorities on the use of their powers to grant discretionary relief. We plan to consult separately on this subject.

Rating Reform

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the initial one-off costs of art-work and creative design of "You and the Community Charge: Exemptions" published on 22 March; what further subsidiary leaflets are planned on aspects of the community charge; when these will be published; and what is the total budgetary provision in his Department's estimates for these publications.

Mr. Ridley: The initial design and art-work costs of the exemptions leaflet were £2,200.

Further leaflets are in preparation on rebates—"The Collective Community Charge", "Students and the Community Charge," "Appeals and Second Homes." These will be published variously over the next few weeks. The total estimated cost of all these publications, including that on exemptions, is approximately £113,100.

Water

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state for each water authority what percentage of the projected necessary funding for improvements in standards of *(a)* drinking water quality, *(b)* sewage treatment and disposal and *(c)* bathing water quality is contained within existing capital programmes.

Mr. Ridley: The information requested by the hon. Member is not available. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan) on 25 January 1989.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide details for each water authority of the funding allocated to improvements in *(a)* drinking water quality, *(b)* sewage treatment and disposal and *(c)* bathing water quality standards through existing capital programmes for each of the next 10 years.

Mr. Ridley: The information requested by the hon. Member is not available.

Concierge Systems (Tower Blocks)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make funds available for a concierge system on the two remaining tower blocks on Edward Woods estate in Shepherds Bush.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The estate action programme has already provided resources for a pilot scheme at Stebbing house involving a concierge system. The council's outline bid for further resources for similar facilities at the two other tower blocks on the estate is under consideration.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the existence of concierge systems on tower blocks is a useful deterrent to crime.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The report "A Better Reception", published by the Department of the Environment in March last year pointed to evidence that concierge schemes do deter crime as well as making blocks of flats more pleasant places in which to live. A further study of concierge and other schemes in local authority high rise blocks of flats is in progress.

Housing (Transfers)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice be given to the London borough of Redbridge concerning the choice to be given to tenants in relation to estate transfers.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* It is for the council to decide what proposal it wishes to put before its tenants.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment whether he has had any meetings with the London borough of Redbridge to discuss its proposed transfer of housing.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Council officers had a meeting with officials of the Department on 3317 January 1989 to discuss in general terms the Department's guidelines on voluntary transfers. There have been no meetings since the Department was sent on 9 March a copy of the report approved by the council's housing services committee on 1 March.

London Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money the London Docklands development corporation has spent on social regeneration in each year of its existence; and what projects it has initiated or supported.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

All London Docklands development corporation's expenditure on regeneration should improve local social conditions directly or indirectly. It is not practicable to identify a clear "social" category or to list the projects. Subject to that the following table gives a indication of expenditure in this area.

£ thousands

	1981-82 1982-83	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Voluntary	63	130	86	781	808	839
Health	9	84	25	—	—	—
Education and Training	445	563	852	415	1,634	791
Other	926	2,843	2,201	1,374	1,669	2,195
Sports Arena	—	124	1,207	1,012	3	—
Housing Improvements	416	390	22	208	1,671	2,287
Housing	1,056	2,228	63	25	—	—
TOTALS	2,915	6,362	4,456	3,815	5,785	6,112

Air Pollution

Mr. Alan Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take to control air pollution from *(a)* National Health Service incinerators and boiler plants and *(b)* other Crown properties.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Clean Air Acts already provide statutory contols over atmospheric emissions from National Health Service incinerators and boilers and other combustion processes on Crown premises. Where there is potential for significant air pollution Crown premises are controlled like any other industrial site by the national pollution inspectorates. Regulations due to come into force on 31 March will bring National Health Service incinerators with an hourly capacity of more than one tonne under their control. A consultation paper in December 1988 proposed further amendment to the schedule of processes subject to prior approval by the national inspectorates and the introduction of a parallel schedule for local authority control. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Waste Management '89

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what departmental representation was made, and what papers from the United Kingdom were presented, at the Waste Management '89 conference held in Tuscon, Arizona, the United States of America, between 26 February and 2 March.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department was not represented at this conference.

Hinckley C (Inquiry)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what departmental resources have been committed to the Hinckley C public inquiry in terms of official presence, the monitoring of evidence and the production of evidence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Departmental officials gave evidence at the Hinckley Point C public inquiry on 9 and 10 February under topic 2 and expect to give evidence under topics 3 and 4. The Department has submitted three proofs of evidence to the inquiry. All evidence submitted to the inquiry is monitored by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Radioactive Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received the proposals from the Nuclear Industry Radioactive Waste Executive for low and intermediate level radioactive waste disposal repositories; and when he expects to make an announcement on the issue.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government received Nirex's report and recommendations on 28 February. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the Government's response in the answer he gave on 21 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) at column *506*.

Urban Development Grants

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the value of urban development grants by metropolitan district council area in the north-west of England for each year since 1979 at constant prices.

Mr. Trippier: Urban development grant was launched in 1982. The table shows the amount of grant in schemes approved in each year in each metropolitan district council area, adjusted to 1988-89 prices.

Value of approved urban development grant at 1988-89 prices in £ millions

	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	Total
Bolton	—	5·160	0·146	0·152	0·684	0·014	6·156
Knowsley	0·704	—	—	3·499	—	—	4·203
Liverpool	1·181	—	—	—	—	—	1·181
Greater Manchester	—	—	2·543	—	—	—	2·543
Manchester	2·720	1·052	—	0·471	0·901	—	5·144
Merseyside	2·049	0·216	—	—	—	—	2·265
Oldham	0·939	0·607	0·032	0·199	0·236	0·390	2·403
Rochdale	0·293	0·061	0·043	—	0·339	—	0·736
Salford	0·512	—	—	0·694	—	0·995	2·201
Sefton	—	—	0·190	—	0·372	—	0·562
Trafford	—	0·035	0·520	—	—	—	0·555
Wigan	0·435	—	—	—	0·048	—	0·483
Wirral	—	0·295	—	3·317	0·460	0·031	4·103

Water Quality

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give since 1979, and by division within the Severn-Trent water authority, the number of breaches of European directives for mercury and cadmium in river sediment, in addition to breaches for the pesticide lindane; and what action he has taken to rectify this.

Mr. Moynihan: There have been no known breaches of the European directives for mercury, cadmium and lindane within the Severn-Trent water authority since the relevant directives came into effect in 1986. Nevertheless, steps are being taken to reduce further inputs of these substances in line with the undertakings given at the 1987 North sea conference.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list information available to him, by division, within the Severn-Trent water authority, as to the number of miles of prime, game and course fishing rivers which have been unsuitable for fishing since 1979.

Mr. Moynihan: Since 1980, the Severn-Trent water authority has designated around 2000 km of rivers and canals for the purposes of EEC Directive 78/659/EEC on the quality of freshwater needed to support fish life. These waters are classified as either salmonoid (game fisheries) or cyprinid (coarse fisheries).

I understand that no stretches have become unsuitable for fishing since 1979.

Rivers (Grading)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by rivers the classification grades of rivers by each division within the Severn-Trent water authority.

Mr. Moynihan: The latest available information is in the form of maps showing the classification of all rivers included in the 1985 river quality survey of England and Wales. This has been published for each water authority, including Severn-Trent. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

Water Authorities (Performance Targets)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for t Environment if he will make a statement on the criteria the performance targets set for each chairman of t national water authorities.

Mr. Moynihan: Targets set and achievement again them, are published each year in water authority's annu report and accounts. Copies are available in the Library the House. In setting these targets the Government tal account of past performance, the characteristics of t region within which the authority operates, and a assessment of the scope for improvement in performanc

Severn-Trent Water Authority (Chairman)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for th Environment if he will list for the past five years for th chairman of Severn-Trent water authority *(a)* the annu bonus he received based on the performance targets s him and *(b)* his basic salary.

Mr. Moynihan: In response to the first part of the hon Member's question, I refer him to the answer I gave to th hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) o 28 February at columns *109-110*.

The basic salary of the chairman of the Severn-Tren water authority in each of the past five years has been a follows:

Year (1 July to 30 June)	Salary (£)
1984-85	33,600
1985-86	35,480
1986-87	37,608
1987-88	41,604
1988-89	45,600

Drought

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the present levels of water reserves in the Severn-Trent water authority; have they applied for any drought orders; what are the risks of drought conditions arising during the coming months of 1989; and if he will list by location and area division the areas most susceptible to drought conditions.

Mr. Moynihan: Reservoir storage levels are now generally satisfactory throughout the Severn-Trent water authority area. Groundwater resources are also adequate except for some spring sources in Gloucestershire. The authority has not applied for any drought orders and foresees no difficulty in meeting demand unless a dry summer occurs. In that event, the east midlands will continue to be vulnerable pending completion of Carsington reservoir due in 1933. Water supplies in limited areas of Gloucestershire could also be affected by drought conditions this summer.

South Yorkshire (Strategic Guidance)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what strategic guidance exists for South Yorkshire; to whom this has been made available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: No strategic guidance exists for South Yorkshire at the present time. I shall be issuing draft strategic guidance in the near future and will welcome the views of the general public, local authorities and other interested organisations.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the change in the level of employment in each of the enterprise zones in the north-west in each of the past three years.

Mr. Trippier: The table below shows how employment levels changed between May 1983 and December 1986, the latest date for which information is available. Information on employment at October 1987 will be published shortly.

	Employment at May 1983 (a)	*Employment at September 1984 (b)*	*Employment at December 1985 (c)*	*Employment at December 1986 (c)*
Allerdale	—	600	1,400	2,000
North-East Lancashire	—	740	1,900	2,400
Salford/Trafford	3,306	3,100	4,200	5,200
Speke	1,018	800	700	1,200

Sources: (a) Roger Tym and Partners, 1984, monitoring enterprise zones year three report.
(b) Enterprise zone information 1983-84, DOE July 1985.
(c) Department of Employment.

Raleigh Site (Nottingham)

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those with whom he has considered the benefits of providing a city grant to assist the redevelopment of the Raleigh site in the inner city area of Nottingham; and whether the case for facilitating an export-led expansion of the company's activities has been taken into account;

(2) if, when considering the city grant application from Raleigh Industries, Nottingham, he will make it his policy to take into account both the normal employment criteria and its overall impact on the relocation and development of this site.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has not received an application in respect of the Raleigh site. If an application is received it will be fully appraised in the usual way, taking into account both the direct employment implications and the wider urban regenerative impact on inner Nottingham.

Sewage Works

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the sewage works by division within the Severn-Trent water authority which are to be allowed relaxation in breaching the legal limits on effluent set by him; and what is the time scale for this relaxation;

(2) if he will list the water authorities who have replied to his document dated 1 February, asking them to speed up applications for relaxation of pollution controls on discharges from sewage works; if he will list the locations of each application so far received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Severn-Trent water authority, and the other water authorities have been invited to apply for time-limited variations to discharge consents for those sewage treatment works where they plan to complete improvement schemes designed to bring these works up to standard by March 1992.

In addition, water authorities may also apply for longer-term variations in respect of a limited number of minor works, where it can be demonstrated that investment to meet current consent requirements would produce negligible environmental benefits.

In all cases, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will consider applications on their merits before deciding whether to grant revised consent conditions. Time limits on these temporary variations will normally be imposed to run from approval of the authority's application to the expected commissioning date of the improved works.

The Department and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution are in discussion with the water authorities about these applications. When applications are made and consents given, details are entered on the authority's register which may be inspected, free of charge, by anyone at all reasonable hours. Responses to the Department's letter of 1 February were obtained from all water authorities by telephone.

Gipsies

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state for the latest date for which he has figures, the numbers of travellers' children of school age within the Doncaster metropolitan borough council area, as detailed in the statistics gathered by his Department's gipsy sites branch; and what were the figures for *(a)* 10 and *(b)* five years ago.

Mr. Trippier: Providing these statistics is a voluntary exercise, and I regret to say that Doncaster has not

provided information on the numbers of travellers' children of school age in its borough since the bi-annual count began in 1979.

Government Buildings (Drinking Water)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by location all Government buildings where the drinking water supply from the mains is unsuitable for drinking and alternative sources have to be used; what are those sources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I have no information which indicates any cases where the water supplied to Government buildings from water undertakers mains is unsuitable for drinking and alternative sources have to be used.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what advice and information, in the form of a code of guidance, is currently available to owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest under the provision of section 33 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; what price is charged for such a code; whether the Nature Conservancy Council issues the code to all owners and occupiers of sites of special scientific interest notified after the passing of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1985; and if he will make a statement;

(2), pursuant to his reply of 10 February, to the hon. Member for Don Valley, *Official Report*, column *816*, on how many occasions a revised code of guidance on sites of special scientific interest has been laid before Parliament since the passing of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1985; what was the reason for withdrawal of the previous code in each case; and if he will make a statement;

(3), pursuant to his answer of 10 February to the hon. Member for Don Valley, *Official Report*, column *816*, how many items in the current code of guidance on sites of special scientific interest have been superseded by the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1985; and whether contravention of the current code constitutes a breach of the amended codes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 33 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides for the preparation and issue, subject to parliamentary approval, of a code of guidance for sites of special scientific interest to interested parties and the general public. The original version of the code was published in 1982 and the Nature Conservancy Council supplied copies free of charge to all owners and occupiers notified of SSSIs under the Act.

Amendments to the notification procedures were introduced by the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985 and the Wildlife and Countryside (Service of Notices) Act 1985. The code of guidance has not been reprinted. A revised version incorporating appropriate amendments is in preparation and will be submitted for approval by Parliament later this year. In the meantime NCC has provided advice to owners and occupiers on initial notifications of an SSSI in the form of its own publication "Sites of Special Scientific Interest".

The code of guidance is advisory; its provisions carry no legal force.

Hadrian's Wall

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to preserve and restore Hadrian's wall.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Responsibility for Hadrian's wall rests with a number of public and private owners. English Heritage acts on behalf of the Government to ensure that those sections of the wall which it owns are properly conserved. It has also provided grants for conservation work on those stretches of the wall owned by others, including the National Trust. The known parts of the wall are scheduled as ancient monuments so that the Secretary of State decides whether to grant consent on all work affecting the wall. In this he is advised by English Heritage.

Microlight Aircraft

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if it is his intention to bring the use of land for the purpose of taking off and landing of microlight aircraft within the scope of the general development order.

Mr. Chope: The use of land for this purpose is already permitted for up to 28 days in any calendar year by class B of part 4 of schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988.

Churston Golf Club

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for South Hams, *Official Report*, 21 March, what further information on the planning appeal with regard to Churston golf club, Torbay, he is waiting for; what are the reasons for his delay in reaching a decision on the appeal; and what factors are required to bring him to a decision.

Mr. Chope: Although pressure of planning business has meant that this appeal has taken longer than I would wish, it is also necessary to consider highway amendments proposed by the developer after the appeal had been lodged. The appeal cannot be determined until interested parties have had an opportunity to comment in writing on the proposed amendments. A decision on the appeal will be issued as quickly as possible when this process has been completed.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has decided on the additional housing investment programme resources to be made available to local authorities with substantial housing defects obligations.

Mr. Trippier: We have decided to allocate the £15 million of HIP resources to 75 local authorities, which are today being notified individually by my Department's regional controllers. The authorities receiving such allocations are as follows:

Region	*Amount (£)*
Northern	
Newcastle-upon Tyne	100,000
Chester-le-Street	40,000

Region	Amount (£)
Gateshead	40,000
Teesdale	40,000
Tynedale	14,000
Total	234,000
North West	
Salford	75,000
Wigan	90,000
South Ribble	60,000
Tameside	20,000
Stockport	45,000
Rossendale	60,000
Crewe	40,000
Bury	50,000
Total	440,000
Merseyside Task Force	
Ellesmere Port	245,000
Liverpool	545,000
St. Helens	25,000
Total	815,000
East Midlands	
Boston	78,000
Chesterfield	186,000
Corby	182,000
Derbyshire Dales	236,000
Gedling	262,000
North East Derbyshire	218,000
North Kesteven	79,000
South Holland	195,000
Total	1,436,000
Eastern	
Thurrock	400,000
Epping Forest	400,000
East Herts	149,000
Three Rivers	140,000
Total	1,089,000
South East	
Eastleigh	150,000
Reading	130,000
Rochester	390,000
Runnymede	135,000
Southampton	650,000
Total	1,455,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley	125,000
Doncaster	50,000
Harrogate	25,000
Leeds	400,000
Rotherham	360,000
Sheffield	100,000
Wakefield	170,000
Total	1,230,000
West Midlands	
Birmingham	445,000
Dudley	169,000
Hereford City	134,000
Newcastle-under-Lyme	389,000
North Warwickshire	260,000
Nuneaton and Bedworth	251,000
Redditch	58,000
Sandwell	667,000
Staffordshire Moorlands	690,000
Stoke-on-Trent	54,000
Walsall	125,000
Warwick	69,000
Wolverhampton	171,000
Worcester City	114,000
Total	3,596,000
South West	
Bristol	1,250,000
Cotswold	100,000
Kerrier	100,000
Mid Devon	130,000
Northavon	350,000
North Cornwall	100,000
North Wiltshire	180,000
Restormel	100,000
Salisbury	200,000
Stroud	150,000
Tewkesbury	400,000
Thamesdown	213,000
West Wiltshire	100,000
Weymouth and Portland	170,000
Woodspring	150,000
Total	3,639,000
London region	
Barking	150,000
Havering	150,000
Merton	100,000
Redbridge	200,000
Richmond	262,000
Waltham Forest	150,000
Total	1,012,000

Empty Dwellings

Mr. Allan Roberts: To ask the secretary of state for the environment if he will list each scheme to bring empty housing association dwellings into use for homeless households, where these dwellings were developed with local authority funding but the local authority is unable to fund the necessary major repairs, financed by the Housing Corporation under the initiative announced on 24 March 1988, *Official Report*, columns *191-92;* and if he will state for each scheme *(a)* the number of units of accommodation provided, *(b)* the housing association involved, *(c)* the local authorities with nomination rights to these units, *(d)* the scheme's date of completion and *(e)* the scheme's capital cost.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not held centrally. I have asked the Housing Corporation to supply so much of it as it can provide without disproportionate cost, to the hon. Member direct.

Housing Investment

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list at 1989-90 prices his Department's gross provision for local authority housing capital investment for each year since 1980-81, together with an estimate for 1989-90.

Mr. Trippier: The public expenditure surveys have made the following gross provision for local authority housing capital investment.

1989-90 prices[1]

Year	*£ million*
1980-81	[2]3,690
1981-82	[2]3,350
1982-83	3,515
1983-84	3,383
1984-85	3,230
1985-86	2,851
1986-87	3,009
1987-88	3,306
1988-89	[3]3,216
1989-90	[3]3,303

[1] Revalued using the GDP deflator.
[2] The White Paper figures have been converted from survey prices to outturn prices and then converted to 1989-90 outturn prices using the GDP deflator.
[3] Includes local authority lending to housing associations shown under "Central Government" in Cm 288 and 609.

Unused Sites (Thamesdown)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment if he will list all the unused sites owned by public bodies within the borough of Thamesdown, together with their owners and sizes in hectares as detailed in the land register.

Mr. Trippier: The information about all the sites, grouped by owner, is listed below:

Site name	*Size in hectares*
Thamesdown Borough Council	
Land at Groundwell Farm, Cricklade Road, Swindon	70·82
Land on West Side of Swindon to Highworth Road	44·52
Land South West of Akers Way/South East of Purton Road, Swindon	41·68
Land at Sparcells, Roughmoor and Lower Shaw Farm, Shaw, Swindon	41·58
Land at Home Farm, Highworth	33·19
Land at Wick Farm, Lydiard and Upper Shaw Farm, Shaw, Swindon	12·91
Land at Broome Farm, Swindon	11·74
Land on North East Side of Kite Hill, Wanborough	4·86
Land on South West Side of Kite Hill, Wanborough	2·05
Land at Elm Grove, Shaw, Swindon	1·52
Wiltshire County Council	
Former Moredon Railway Line	15·38
Land at Kingshill, Swindon (Rushey Platt)	9·63
Land at Hughes Street, Swindon	9·51
Land at Dorcan School Swindon	8·22
Land South of Church Street, Stratton St. Margaret	7·49
Land at Haydon Wick	2·21
Land at the Rear of Beatrice Street, Swindon	1·86
Land at Belmont Farm, Codrington, Near Wroughton	1·82
Land at Ruskin Junior School Annexe, Stratton St. Margaret	1·62
Land at Kingsdown High School, Stratton St. Margaret	1·62
Land at Meadway/Stonehill Green, Westlea Down, Swindon	1·60
Land at Baker's Field, Lower Wanborough	1·47
Land adjoining Attlee Crescent, Stratton St. Margaret	1·38
Park Farm, Moredon, Swindon	1·32
Land at Scarborough Road, Swindon	0·66
Former Queenstown Infants School/6-10 Turl Street/ 15-17 Oriel Street, Swindon	0·43
Swindon Health Authority	
Land at Cricklade Road, Gorse Hill, Swindon	2·16
Department of Transport	
Land at Stratton St. Margaret, Swindon	5·16
British Rail	
Land Rear of Dean Street, Swindon	5·46

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tree preservation orders have been made in each county in England *(a)* for individual trees and *(b)* for groups of trees or woods; and what area is covered by the latter case.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. A recent sample survey of 31 districts and boroughs in England found that more than 90 per cent. of tree preservation orders related to trees in or on the fringe of urban areas, and that a large number were on single trees in front gardens. The consultants who carried out the survey for the Department concluded that a typical authority in their sample had over 5,000 trees protected by over 200 orders.

Insulation

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will include the inspection of loft roof, cavity wall and under floor insulation in the statutory requirements for which local authority buildings inspectors are responsible.

Mr. Trippier: The Building Regulations 1985 include requirements relating to the conservation of fuel and power which can be met in a variety of ways, including loft roof, cavity wall and under floor insulation. There are also specific requirements relating to the way in which cavity wall insulation is undertaken. Local authority building control officers are already responsible for ensuring that building work to which the regulations apply complies with these requirements.

Development Corporations

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether, following the National Audit Office's report, the Merseyside development corporation has introduced a greater price competition for any contracts going out to consultants;

(2) whether the Merseyside development corporation has changed its marketing strategy following the National Audit Office report on urban development corporations;

(3) if, following the National Audit Office's report, the Merseyside development corporation has changed its tendering policy for works contracts;

(4) if any changes have taken place in the monitoring of the developer of the Albert dock following the report of the National Audit Office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The work of all UDCs is continuously monitored and the NAO findings are taken into account in that process. The report of the Public Accounts Committee is awaited. In the meantime the Merseyside development corporation has:

(i) reviewed its procedures for the competitive selection of consultants to place greater emphasis on price competition in addition to the factors such as relevant experience and past performance. Commissions are

awarded on the basis of best value for money and with rare exception firms submitting the lowest fees and expenses receive the commission;
(ii) strengthened its marketing team and activities, including the new appointment of a marketing manager. The MDC is taking a much more active role in promoting Merseyside, as part of Merseyside integrated development operations, the business opportunities on Merseyside initiative and north-west promotions such as INWARD and Fast Forward, as well as continuing its support for the Merseyside tourism board;
(iii) continued to place all of its work contracts by competitive tender to suitable firms with proven contract performance. Tender lists are now compiled to ensure that at least one firm is included which has not had a recent tendering opportunity;
(iv) met regularly the Albert dock company at both chairman and director level to plan and to monitor the property management and service arrangements and to review charges and income.

Merseyside Development Corporation

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the current members of the Merseyside development corporation; and if he intends to make any new appointments.

Mr. Trippier: The members of the Merseyside development corporation board are:

Mr. Philip Carter CBE—Chairman
Mr. John Smith CBE—Deputy Chairman
Professor Graham Ashworth CBE
Mr. Brian Thaxter
Professor Patrick Minford
Mr. Clive Lewis, FRICS, FSVA
Councillor Thomas Glover
Councillor John Hale
Dr. John Ritchie MBE

New appointments will be announced shortly.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since its establishment the amount of private investment attracted into the Merseyside development corporation area; and if he will give the investment in *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* the Wirral.

Mr. Trippier: Private investment in Merseyside development corporation's area is as follows:

	Liverpool (including Bootle) (£ million)	*Wirral (£ million)*	*Total (£ million)*
1981-82	—	—	—
1982-83	—	—	—
1983-84	2·535	—	2·535
1984-85	4·995	—	4·995
1985-86	4·138	—	4·138
1986-87	6·413	—	6·413
1987-88	7·600	0·500	8·100
1988-89	10·200	4·500	14·700

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since its establishment the amount of commercial or industrial floor space owned by the Merseyside development corporation which was *(a)* let *(b)* under refurbishment *(c)* awaiting refurbishment, and *(d)* awaiting demolition.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows. Figures are not readily available for years prior to 1987.

Industrial/Commercial Floorspace owned by Merseyside Development Corporation

	March 1987 (000s sq ft)	*March 1988 (000s sq ft)*	*March 1989 (000s sq ft)*
Let	1,074	1,193	1,477
Awaiting/under Refurbishment[1]	1327	1,431	805
Awaiting Demolition	791	78	610
Total	3,192	2,702	2,892

[1] These two categories cannot be disaggregated.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projected number of new jobs which will be created in the next two years by the Merseyside development corporation; and if he will divide this figure between *(a)* construction and *(b)* the longer term jobs.

Mr. Trippier: The Merseyside development corporation's programme is expected to provide an estimated 3,500 man years of construction work and 3,200 longer-term jobs over the next two years.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many construction jobs will be created by the work of the Merseyside development corporation; and how many will go to local workers.

Mr. Trippier: Investment by the Merseyside development corporation has led to on-site construction jobs providing between 800-1000 man years' work annually since 1981. This is expected to grow to 1,400-1,600 jobs a year during further phases of the redevelopment programme. Merseyside contractors win competitively over 90 per cent. of MDC contracts by value and the vast majority of employees are Merseyside residents.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sums of money spent in each year since its inception by the Merseyside development corporation; and if he will give the sums for *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* Wirral.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

Expenditure (£ million)

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Liverpool (including Bootle)	2·875	18·043	28·309	23·783	24·115	19·896	20·710	11·939
Wirral	1·072	0·118	0·643	1·105	0·839	0·854	2·597	3·685
TOTAL PROJECTS	3·947	18·161	28·952	24·888	24·954	20·750	23·307	15·624
Administration, estate management and contributions to voluntary organisations	1·086	2·597	3·048	4·353	3·039	4·147	4·968	5·376
TOTAL MDC EXPENDITURE	5·033	20·758	32·000	29·241	27·993	24·897	28·275	21·000

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the numbers of jobs created each year of its existence by the Merseyside development corporation; and if he will give separate figures for *(a)* Liverpool and *(b)* Wirral.

Mr. Trippier: The promotion and marketing budget for the Merseyside development corporation is shown below. The figures can be broken down only from 1984-84 onwards.

£ thousands

	1981-82	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Merseyside/MDC Image Advertising	n/a	n/a	n/a	585	310	380	279	366
Site-Specific Advertising	n/a	n/a	n/a	110	282	130	62	262
Support for the Merseyside Tourism Board	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	250	250	281
Press/Information Service	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	12	56	58	62
TOTAL	31	423	603	720	604	816	649	971

Housing Statistics

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority houses were built in *(a)* Warrington, *(b)* Macclesfield, *(c)* Congleton, *(d)* Crewe and Nantwich, *(e)* Vale Royal and *(f)* Staffordshire Moorlands in (i) 1978 and (ii) 1988; and how many it is estimated will be built in these areas in 1989.

Mr. Trippier Local authority housebuilding completions reported as taking place in these housing authorities in 1978 appear in "Local Housing Statistics", issue 49, a copy of which is available in the Library. Figures reported for 1988 are as follows:

	Number of local authority housebuilding completions
Staffordshire Moorlands	15
Congleton	8
Crewe and Nantwich	8
Macclesfield	26
Vale Royal	57
Warrington	[1]64

[1] January to November only

The Department does not have estimates of 1989 housebuilding activity by local authorities.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* private sector houses and *(b)* public sector housing units there are currently on (i) Notting Hill housing trust-owned estates and (ii) other housing association estates; how many such units are proposed by these bodies in the next year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier This information is not held by the Department, the Housing Corporation is responsible for monitoring, supervising and distributing funds to registered housing associations in England. I have, therefore, asked the Housing Corporation to supply to my hon. Friend direct information about existing and planned developments in his constituency involving the Notting Hill housing trust and other housing associations.

Council House Building

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities currently have a council house building programme.

Mr. Trippier A total of 355 local authorities indicated on their housing investment programme returns (HIP2), completed in April 1988, that they expected to incur expenditure on new housebuilding construction in 1988-89.

Housing Shortages

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will assess the extent to which Waveney district council can benefit from recent Government initiatives of policy on the co-operation between local authorities and the private and housing association sectors to reduce housing shortages.

Mr. Trippier Waveney district council, along with all other housing authorities, will benefit from our policies designed to promote authorities' enabling role in ensuring an adequate supply of houses for sale and rent in urban and rural areas.

Lindane Container (Loss)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the policy implications of the loss of the lindane container in the Channel.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Lindane is a pesticide with wood preservative and agricultural uses. As such it is subject to control as a pesticide under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. It has been identified among the group of substances known as organochlorines which are considered most hazardous to the aquatic environment in view of their toxicity, persistence and capacity for bio-accumulation. Lindane is included in the provisional priority list of dangerous substances (the Red List) whose release to United Kingdom coastal and inland waters should be minimised and which will be the subject of new and tighter controls.

A major accidental discharge of the substance would be of serious environmental concern. There are national and international requirements for the loss or likely loss of this substance to be reported without delay by the fastest telecommunication channels available and with the highest possible priority to the nearest coastal state. If a marine accident occurs which threatens United Kingdom interests, the responsibility for combating a potential pollution hazard at sea rests with the marine pollution control unit of the Department of Transport, which takes account of advice from the fisheries Departments and others concerned with protection of the marine environment.

Development (Islington)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will indicate, for all housing associations and co-operatives carrying out approved development work within the London borough of Islington, what block 2 tender approvals have been issued and for which schemes for financial year 1989-90, and for how many units of accommodation in each case; and what criteria have been used in reaching decisions about which projects to select for such tender approval.

Mr. Trippier: This information is not held by the Department. The Housing Corporation is responsible for allocating its capital programme to individual housing associations and schemes within the broad framework agreed annually by my right hon. Friend. I have, therefore, asked the Housing Corporation to reply to the hon. Member direct.

Gloucester District Council

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what authority officials in his Department recently phoned Gloucester district council with consent for a proposed voluntary transfer; and on what grounds the valuation of the sale was changed.

Mr. Trippier: Gloucester city council has not applied for consent to dispose of its housing nor could it do so before consulting tenants as required by schedule 3A to the Housing Act 1985.

On the instructions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, officials informed the council that he continued to take the view that sales of tenanted council housing should be at tenanted market value; but that he would expect to be willing in this particular case to consider sympathetically any application from the city council for consent under section of the Local Government Act 1988 to assist a purchaser of its housing where the assistance was in respect of specified works on the property being transferred, firm arrangements were in place to ensure that it was used only in connection with those works and the amount of any assistance did not exceed £1,500 in respect of each dwelling.

London Docklands

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the numbers of jobs within the area of the London docklands development corporation from 1981 to the latest convenient date which *(a)* have ceased to exist within the area, *(b)* have been transferred into the area from elsewhere, *(c)* have been originated in the area as new employment and *(d)* now exist in the area, and the number in *(c)* above expressed as a percentage of *(d)*.

Mr. Trippier: The LDDC/RISU employment survey, conducted in 1987, showed that 36,385 jobs existed in the LDDC area in companies responding to the survey. Of this total, 15,724 jobs were in companies which had moved to London Docklands since 1981; 4,593 jobs were in companies originating in the area since 1981; and 16,068 were in companies present throughout the period. Jobs in companies originating in the area since 1981 therefore accounted for 12·6 per cent. of the total number of jobs at the time of the survey.

The 1981 annual census of employment counted 27,123 jobs in London Docklands. There was therefore a net increase of 9,172 jobs in the area between 1981 and 1987. By 1987 companies which were not present in 1981 accounted for 20,318 jobs.

The survey report deduces that 11,145 jobs were lost in companies present throughout the period and in companies which ceased trading in the area.

All figures from the 1987 survey relate to jobs recorded in "employment establishments" only. In addition, there were 5,668 people employed in "other employments". The estimated response rate to the survey was 93 per cent.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to protect areas of outstanding natural beauty from untoward development *(a)* by strengthening controls or *(b)* by adding certain of them to national parks.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Controls over development in areas of outstanding natural beauty are already the same as those in national parks. Permitted development rights are restricted in those areas, and planning policy guidance note 7 (Rural Enterprise and Development), a copy of which is in the Library, recognises that the location, design and external appearance of development in these areas should be subject to special scrutiny, and that major industrial or commercial development would generally be inconsistent with their designation.

There are no plans to designate any AONB as a national park.

Norfolk Broads

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to extend the number of national parks by including the Norfolk Broads.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The new Broads Authority established under the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 exercises the same range of powers and functions as those conferred on national park authorities and will receive the same rate of Government grant.

Ivory

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he takes any measures to ensure that imported ivory products do not originate from illegally taken ivory.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The United Kingdom strictly implements controls on trade in ivory in accordance with the convention on international trade in endangered species which is applied in the European Community under EC Regulations 3626/82 and 3418/83.

Office of Water Supply and National Rivers Authority

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost for the Office of Water Supply and the National Rivers Authority in 1990; how many staff will be required; and how many offices will be required.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The current estimated costs of the water services office and the

customer services committees will be about £3·7 million in the year 1990-91; the staff will number about 80. The number of offices required is a matter for the Director General of Water Services to decide in due course.

The estimated cost of the National Rivers Authority in 1990-91 is £290 million. It is expected to employ some 6,500 staff. The vast majority of the NRA's staff will be based in the regions, mainly in accommodation which will transfer to it from the water authorities but a central policy unit of about 60 will be located in London in the offices currently occupied by the National Rivers Authority advisory committee.

Archaeological Sites

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Evironment if he will take steps to ensure that unscheduled archaeological sites of importance discovered in the course of site clearance following the granting of planning permission for redevelopment can be excavated and recorded prior to redevelopment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[pursuant to her answer 22 March 1989 c. 643]:* The desirability of preserving an ancient monument and its setting is a material consideration for the determination of planning applications, whether or not that monument is scheduled. Local planning authorities may also wish to impose conditions requiring developers to allow access for archaeologists to observe work and record items of interest, when granting planning permission affecting unscheduled sites of archaeological interest.

It remains open to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, after consultation with English Heritage, to schedule monuments which he considers to be of national importance even after planning permission for redevelopment has been granted. In such cases scheduled monument consent would then be needed before either archaeological or development work could proceed. Where significant finds are made before or during the course of development, it is usually preferable to resolve the situation by non-statutory means. We commend the growing practice of voluntary agreements between developers and archaeologists to enable archaeological evaluations to be carried out before redevelopment.

Director General of Water Services

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment where the Office of the Director General of Water Services will be located.

Mr. Ridley *[pursuant to the reply, 23 March 1989, c. 782]:* I am pleased to announce that the first Director General of Water Services will be Ian Byatt, currently deputy chief economic adviser at the Treasury.

The establishment of a new independent regulator for the water industry is a key component of our plans for the industry. The new water plcs will be regional monopolies and the regulator's function will be to ensure that neither the newly privatised nor the existing water companies can unfairly exploit this. The Director General of Water Services will protect consumers of all the companies, compare the performance of the different companies and ensure that each company has clear incentives to improve its efficiency.

The director general will ensure that the companies carry out their functions effectively and that they can raise the finance they need to do so. He will be responsible for ensuring that companies comply with the conditions of their appointments.

Consumer protection will be a central part of the new director general's functions. His responsibilities will include:

—regulation of charges by setting a ceiling for price increases;

—monitoring of service standards, and enforcement of higher standards where necessary;

—establishment of customer service committees to investigate complaints and provide a forum for consumers to make known their views; and

—encouraging greater efficiency by promoting competition within the industry so that all may aspire to the standards of service delivery and cost-effectiveness of the best.

The director general will take up these duties once companies have been appointed as water and sewerage undertakers in September, under the proposals in the Water Bill currently being considered by Parliament. In the meantime Ian Byatt will be preparing for his new responsibilities. We shall be liaising closely with him to ensure a smooth transition to the new regime, and he will be a source of advice to me in setting up the regulatory framework for the companies on their appointment in September.

SCOTLAND

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount of hill livestock compensatory allowances paid in 1988; what was the total number of claimants; and how many individuals claimed more than £6,750.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Hill livestock compensatory allowances amounting to just over £43·5 million were paid in 1988 to 18,365 applicants. Of these, 1,793 received payments of more than £6,750.

Farm Sizes

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of farming units in Scotland; and how many are between *(a)* four and eight British size units, *(b)* eight and 12 British size units and *(c)* 12 and 16 British size units.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of farms included in the June 1988 agricultural census in Scotland was 26,239. Within this total the numbers of farms in the ranges for which information is sought are as follows:

British size units	*Number of farms*
4 to 8	3,170
8 to 12	2,354
12 to 16	1,967

Public Defender System

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in implementing a public defender in Scotland as recommended by the Hughes royal commission.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Provision has been made in the Legal Aid (Scotland) Act 1986 for the

employment by the Scottish Legal Aid Board of solicitors to act for clients. My right hon. and learned Friend intends to undertake full consultations before bringing the provision into force.

Operations (Private Hospitals)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many operations were contracted out to private hospitals in Scotland, region by region; and at what cost during 1988.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the health boards which are making use of private sector facilities with support from the funds allocated to reduce waiting lists in 1988-89, the number of patients to be treated and the costs, are as follows:

Health Board	*Specialty*	*Patients*	*Cost (£)*
Greater Glasgow	Urology	30	20,000
	Orthopaedics	113	154,781
Highland	Orthopaedics	12	45,324
Lanarkshire	Urology	10	15,000
Lothian	Orthopaedics	14	57,282
	Ophthalmology	8	20,000
Dumfries and Galloway	Gynaecology	39	17,300

Health boards which make use of private sector facilities do so if they are cost-effective or if there are constraints which prevent a board from increasing the number of patients they can treat in-house.

Prisoners

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the breakdown of category A prisoners in Scotland under the groupings *(a)* convicted Irish Republican Army terrorists, *(b)* international terrorists, *(c)* murderers, *(d)* armed robbers, *(e)* rapists, *(f)* drug dealers, and *(g)* others (i) in total and (ii) listed by each prison.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information as at 30 March 1989 is as follows:

Grouping	*Total*	*Peterhead*	*Prison Aberdeen*	*Perth*
Murderers	12	10	1	1
Armed Robbers	3	2	0	1
Drug Dealers	1	1	0	0
Others	8	7	1	0

There are no category A prisoners in Scotland in the groupings *(a)*, *(b)* or *(e)*. The figures exclude one untried category A prisoner.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the numbers of category A, B and other prisoners in each prison in Scotland, listed by prison and by county address.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of prisoners in Scottish prisons listed by category, prison and region as at 24 March 1989 are:

Establishment	*Region*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*Total*
Aberdeen	Grampian	2	91	57	2	152
Barlinnie	Strathclyde	—	840	6	—	846
Castle Huntly	Tayside	—	—	—	118	118
Cornton Vale	Central	—	36	102	13	151
Dumfries	Dumfries and Galloway	—	96	16	—	112
Dungavel	Strathclyde	—	—	28	84	112
Edinburgh	Lothians	1	311	265	31	608
Friarton	Tayside	—	—	68	9	77
Glenochil	Central	—	177	126	—	303
Glenochil YOI	Central	—	1	97	—	98
Greenock	Strathclyde	—	143	15	—	158
Inverness	Highland	—	67	38	—	105
Longriggend	Strathclyde	—	178	24	—	202
Low Moss	Strathclyde	—	—	394	—	394
Noranside	Tayside	—	—	—	110	110
Penninghame	Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	73	73
Perth	Tayside	2	313	142	6	463
Peterhead	Grampian	20	101	—	—	121
Polmont	Central	—	259	94	26	379
Shotts	Strathclyde	—	350	150	1	501

Highland Regional Council (Structure Plan)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to reject policy No. 53 of the Highland regional council's structure plan.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As Highland regional council's structure plan review is only at the consultative draft stage this proposed policy concerning skiing at Cairngorm has not yet been submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend for his approval. Only when the council has considered the representations submitted to it in response to its consultative draft will it formally submit the structure plan to my right hon. and learned Friend for his approval. There is then a statutory period during which objections to the plan can be made. In view of the role which my right hon. and learned Friend will have to play in the future consideration of the plan he cannot at this stage comment on policy No. 53 in the consultative draft.

Nurse Grading

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if nurses who commenced post-registration training on or after 1 April 1988 have the right of appeal over their recent clinical grading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All nurses assimilated to the new clinical grading structure last year—including post-registration students—have the right to appeal under the agreed Whitley procedures.

Porcine Somatotropin

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has concerning the use of porcine somatotropin in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Limited trials on the use of porcine somatotropin were carried out in Scotland up to 1988 under an animal test certificate (ATC) issued by MAFF. This ATC has now expired and, as no product licence has subsequently been issued, it would be illegal to sell or supply porcine somatotropin in Scotland, as it would be elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Child Abuse

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what Government-funded research into the sexual abuse of children *(a)* has taken place since 1979, *(b)* is currently taking place and *(c)* is under consideration, giving the cost of each project listed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In recent years the Scottish Office has funded or contributed to the funding of three research projects on the subject of child abuse, two of which included aspects of child sexual abuse and a third which focused specifically on that problem. Details of the projects and their costs, and of further research currently under consideration, are as follows:

Research undertaken since 1979

1. Dr. A. Boddy and Mr. D. Gough: University of Glasgow, "Child abuse interventions: a review of the research literature". Total cost £23,000. (Funded by the Department of Health and Social Security with a Scottish Office contribution; project completed.)

2. Dr. A. Boddy and Mr. D. Gough: University of Glasgow, "A longitudinal study of child abuse in Glasgow". Total cost £80,000. (Research completed; final report awaited.)

Research currently taking place

3. Mrs. L. Waterhouse: University of Edinburgh, "Management of intra-familial child sexual abuse". Total cost £69,400.

4. A research brief inviting bids to undertake research into child sexual abuse, issued on 28 February 1989, has resulted in four proposals which are under consideration. Estimated cost £100,000.

Sand Eels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his reply of 6 February, *Official Report*, columns 561-562, he will state the critical level of spawning stock size for Shetland sand eels, below which recruitment will be affected by the abundance of spawning fish; and how this is estimated.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is not possible to state precisely the critical size of spawning stock required to protect recruitment from stock-related effects. However it seems unlikely that it is higher than the lowest recorded level that has produced average recruitment or better. For the Shetland stocks, that suggests a spawning stock biomass of around 20,000 tonnes.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment his Department has made as to whether the voluntary measures taken by Shetland fishermen to reduce catches of young sand eels are likely to conserve stocks of O group and 1 group sand eels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Estimates of the abundance of young O group sand eels are based on the accumulated catches of the respective year class in successive years, and it will therefore be two or three years before a full assessment of the effects of the voluntary measures is possible. Landing samples have revealed a very low incidence of very small sand eels in 1987 and 1988 catches but this could be due to the effects of the voluntary restrictions, or to low levels of recruitment of young sand eels, or to both.

Recent scientific data support the earlier view that the decline in stocks is likely to be due primarily to recent low levels of recruitment rather than the effects of the fishery. However, given current concern about the health of the stocks, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has today announced proposals to introduce statutory controls on sand eel fisheries in Scottish inshore waters. Comments on the proposals are being invited from interested parties.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the total catch by weight, fishing effort and proportions of both O group and 1 group fish, by weight, for the Minch sand eel fishery since 1980.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested for ICES division VIa (West of Scotland including the Minch) is as follows:

	Total catch (*tonnes*)	*Fishing effort* (*Days fishing*)	*Percentage* (*by weight*) *O group*	*1 Group*
1980	180	26	30	46
1981	5,972	303	21	33
1982	10,786	588	15	13
1983	13,051	447	34	20
1984	14,166	446	13	28
1985	18,586	475	22	3
1986	24,469	530	21	33
1987	14,479	290	11	52
1988	24,465	455	3	4

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount spent by the Scottish Development Agency in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Scottish Development Agency in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Lang: Expenditure by the Scottish Development Agency on management and computer consultancy contracts in the year to 31 March 1989 amounted to £5,925,311. This includes fees for research and development, advisory services, appraisal and administration, such as tax and accounting advice, pension and legal consultancies, as well as management and computer consultancies.

A detailed breakdown comprising the names of companies which have been successfully tendered for contracts and the subject of these assignments cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate expense.

"Working for Patients"

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the total cost for the launch of the White Paper "Working for Patients", itemising as far as possible the cost in respect of each specific part.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 16 February 1989.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has given any directive to the Common Services Agency in respect of competitive tendering for non-emergency ambulance services in Scotland; and what is his policy as to whether such services should be put out to private tender.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galbraith) on 20 July 1988 at column *509*.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what change there has been in the demands upon the ambulance service in the Highlands and Islands following the recent changes in the Highland and Islands hospital patients travel scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The demand for ambulance transport in the Highland and Western Isles area has shown a decline since the changes to the patients' travel expenses scheme, which came into effect on 11 April 1988.

Woodland Grants

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on how many occasions the Forestry Commission awarded grants under the broadleaved woodland grant scheme in Scotland, between the inception in 1985 and closure in 1988; and on how many occasions the grant of £100 was for obtaining professional advice in the preparation of a plan of operations under the broadleaved woodland grant scheme awarded.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: To date, the Forestry Commission has approved 1,257 applications for grant under the broadleaved woodland grant scheme in Scotland. The grant of £100 has been paid on 158 of these applications.

New Towns

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the organisations and bodies which have responded to the consultation document, "The Scottish New Towns—Maintaining the Momentum."

Mr. Lang: The following are the organisations and bodies which have responded to the consultation document:

Abron Community Council (Cumbernauld)
Ardrossan, Saltcoats, Stevenston Enterprise Trust
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board
Ayrshire Chamber of Industries
Barclay and Cameron Way Residents Association (Livingston)
Bathgate Area Support for Enterprise Ltd (BASE)
Beckman Industrial Ltd
Bellsquarry Community Council (Livingston)
Broomlands and Bourtreehill Residents Association
Busby East Church
Calderwood Community Council
Church of Scotland Department of Ministry and Mission
City of Glasgow District Council
Coleman Ballantine Architects, Glasgow
Collydean Residents/Tenants Association (Glenrothes)
Condorrat Community Council (Cumbernauld)
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Craigshill Initiative (Livingston)
Crofthead Farm Community Centre
Cumbernauld Business Associations
Cumbernauld Citizens Advice Bureau
Cumbernauld Development Corporation
Cumbernauld and District Trades Council
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Constituency Association Scottish National Party
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Constituency Labour Party
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth District Council
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Enterprise Trust
Cumbernauld Ministers' Fraternal
Cumbernauld Theatre Trust Ltd
Cunninghame District Council
Deans Community High School (Livingston)
Deans and District Labour Party (Livingston)
Deans Senior Citizens' Club (Livingston)
Dedridge Community Council (Livingston)
Donaldsons
Dreghorn (IDC) Tenants/Residents Association
Dundee and Tayside Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Fife Branch
East Kilbride Central Branch, Scottish National Party
East Kilbride Chamber of Commerce
East Kilbride Christian Council
East Kilbride Citizens Advice Bureau
East Kilbride Development Corporation
East Kilbride District Council
East Kilbride Fabian Society
East Kilbride Old Parish Church
East Kilbride Residents Federation
East Kilbride Voluntary Organisation's Council
Fife Regional Council
Fraser and Partner, Business Managers, Glenrothes
Girdle Toll and Bourtreehill Community Council (Cumbernauld)
Glenrothes Development Agency
Glenrothes Development Corporation
Glenrothes Enterprise Trust Ltd.
Glenrothes Residents Council
Greenhills East Resident Association
Hamilton District Council
Housing Architects Group Irvine Development Corporation
Institute of Housing in Scotland
Institute of Civil Engineers
Inveralmond Community High School
Irvine Development Corporation
Kildrum Parish Church
King and Co.
Kirkcaldy District Council
Knightsridge Community Council (Livingston)
Knightsridge West Residents Association (Livingston)
Labour Party Scottish Council
Landscape Institute Scotland
Livingston Constituency Labour Party
Livingston Development Corporation
Livingston East Branch, Scottish National Party
Livingston Ecumenical Parish
Livingston Federation of Residents and Tenants Association
Livingston Industrial and Commercial Association
Livingston Justice and Peace Group
Livingston Voluntary Organisations Council
Livingston YWCA
Lothian Regional Council
Motherwell District Council
Murieston Residents' Association (Livingston)
Murray Community Council
National Mobility Office
National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO)

National and Local Government Officers Association—Cumbernauld
Neighbourhood Care Networks (Livingston)
Planning Section Livingston
Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
ScotRail, British Railways Board
Scottish Building Employers' Federation
Scottish Church's Industrial Mission
Scottish Community Woods Campaign
Scottish Consumer Council
Scottish Council for Single Homeless
Scottish Democrats
Scottish Development Agency
Scottish Engineering Employers' Association
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Scottish Homes
Scottish Local Authorities with New Towns (SLANT)
Scottish National Party
Scottish New Towns Housing Association
Scottish New Towns Housing Managers Group
Scottish Old Age Pensions Association
Scottish Society of Directors of Planning
Scottish Special Housing Association
Scottish Trades Union Congress
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Sealand Industries PLC Cumbernauld
Sixth Year Cumbernauld High School
St. Mungos Parish Church
Strathclyde Regional Council
The Building Societies Association
The Kirk Session of Livingston Old Parish
The Royal Town Planning Institute
Town and Country Planning Association
West Lothian College of Further Education
West Lothian District Council
Whinneyknowe and Balgeddie Meadows Residents Association (Glenrothes)

Local Health Councils

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to publish his proposals on the future of local health councils.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I shall make an announcement about the representation of consumer views in the NHS when consideration of the management consultants' report and other proposals and comments which have been received has been completed.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were *(a)* pupil-teacher ratios and *(b)* university staff-student ratios in Scotland in 1978-79 and 1987-88.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The pupil-teacher ratios in education authority schools (nursery, primary, secondary and special) were 17·7 in 1978-79 and 16·1 in 1987-88. Universities throughout Great Britain are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Teaching Posts

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of teaching posts in *(a)* Scottish schools and *(b)* Scottish higher education in 1978, 1979, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Comprehensive information about the numbers of teaching posts is not available centrally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Single Mothers (Income Support)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance is given to social security officers as to the age at which it is deemed appropriate for pre-school children of single mothers to be placed with child minders when assessing the mothers' eligibility for income support.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. There is no requirement for children of any age to be placed with child minders as a condition of receiving income support.

Mr. George Metters

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he hopes to reply to letters dated 27 January and 7 February from the hon. Member for South Hams, in relation to his constituent Mr. George Metters of Marians' Maples, Stoke Gabriel, Totnes, Devon, and his claim for attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: A reply was sent on 22 March.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for the week starting 10 April, and each ensuing week, how many people currently in receipt of housing benefit transitional payments in the Leeds, West constituency will cease to become eligible; and what this is as a percentage of the total number of those claiming transitional payments in the constituency;

(2) for the week starting 10 April, and each ensuing week, how many people currently in receipt of housing benefit transitional payments will cease to become eligible; and what this is as a percentage of the total number of those claiming transitional payments.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Until the closing date of 30 June 1989 is reached and all applications for housing benefit transitional payments have been received and assessed, it will not be possible to state how many people will no longer receive transitional payments from 10 April 1989 because of the £2 flat rate reduction, but we estimate that around 40 per cent. will no longer qualify for payments. The information requested is not available by constituency area.

Mr. Corbyn : To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have been paid housing benefit transitional payments; of these, how many will lose their transitional protection after 9 April because they have capital in excess of £8,000; and how many others will lose their transitional protection because the amount of their payments is less than £2 per week.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Up to 24 March 188,095 people had been awarded housing benefit transitional payments and payments have been made in 180,874 cases. Until the closing date of 30 June 1989 is reached and all applications have been received and assessed it will not be possible to state how many people will no longer receive transitional protection from 10 April because of the £2 flat rate reduction, but we estimate that around 40 per cent. will no longer qualify for payments. It will not be possible to say how many people will no longer qualify for transitional

protection because their capital has risen above £8,000 since April 1988 until all renewal application forms have been returned to the transitional payments unit.

Family Credit

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing how many people were *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* in receipt of family credit in 1988-89, broken down into (i) employees and (ii) self-employed, using the first assumption of eligibility and take-up made in October 1987 and the second assumption as described in his answer to the hon. Member for Bolton North-East (Mr. Thurnham), 17 March, *Official Report*, column 392.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information is shown in the table. Reliable estimates cannot be made of the numbers of self-employed people eligible for family credit.

	Employees		*Self-employed*	*Total*
	Eligible	*Receiving*	*Receiving*	*Receiving*
October 1987				
Forecast for 1988-89[1]	[2]675,000	405,000	45,000	450,000
March 1989				
Estimate for 1988	500,000	253,000 (actual)	24,000 (actual)	277,000 (actual)

Notes:
[1] As revised to take account of the March 1988 Budget.
[2] No direct estimate of the eligible population was made in October 1987, when a projection of the 1988-89 caseload was made on the assumption that the take up rate would be one fifth higher than the FIS take up rate. However, an eligible employee population of 675,000 would follow from the assumption of a FIS take up rate of 50 per cent.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the number of people receiving family credit; and how much he expects to spend on family credit in the financial year 1988-89.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the end of March 253,500 families were receiving family credit, and a further 47,000 claims were awaiting determination. The outturn of expenditure for 1988-89 is now expected to be slightly less than forecast in Cm. 615.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people would be entitled to family credit in 1989 if there was no compensation for free school meals or welfare milk in the child credit rates.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 20 March 1989]*: A specific amount in respect of compensation for free school meals and free welfare milk and vitamins was included on a once-and-for-all basis in the child credit rates set at the start of the family credit scheme in April 1988 but, following the uprating, this element is no longer separately identifiable within the April 1989 rates. The information requested is therefore not available.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The estimated total amount spent by the Department in 1988 on social security-related management and computer consultancy was £35·391 million. The expenditure came partly from the combined DHSS budgets for the financial years 1987-88 and 1988-89. Where appropriate the cost of projects has been apportioned when the work involved both social security and health aspects.

Details of each consultancy awarded by the Department on social security-related matters are as follows:

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Anderson Consulting	Overseas Branch Computer Requirement
Anderson Consulting	Operational Strategy Training Development
Anderson Consulting	Benefit Branch Computerisation
Answerpoint	Local Office Project
Applied Systems Engineering	Local Office Project
Applied Systems Engineering	Service Management Group
Applied Systems Engineering	Central Design Authority
Applied Systems Engineering	Family Credit Project
Arthur Young	Integrated Complementing System
Arthur Young	Performance Based Systems
Arthur Young	Quality Assurance Package for Social Security Offices

Firm	Subject of assignment
Bell Software	Local Office Project
B.I.S. Limited	Tools Feasibility Study
B.I.S. Limited	Database Design Support
B.I.S. Limited	Strategy Data Administration
British Telecom	Local Office Microcomputer Project
Cap Industry Limited	Local Office Project
Cavendish Tricorne	Overbearing Model (Operational Research Service)
Computer Search	National Unemployment Benefit System
Computer People	Local Office Project
Coopers and Lybrand	Department of Social Security Agency Study
C.S.C.	Product Assurance (North Fylde Central Office)
C.S.C.	Strategy Security
Dataflex	Local Office Microcomputer Project
D. E. Barnard Systems	Scrutiny of Printing and Publications
Digitus	Self Instruction Unit Computerisation
ENATOR	Performance Based Systems
ENATOR	Integrated Complementing System
EOSYS	Cable Management
Falcon Systems	Local Office Microcomputer Project
Forvus	Database Management System
Gallup	Staff Attitude Survey of Local Offices
Gallup	Staff Attitude Survey of Headquarters
I.C.L.	National Unemployment Benefit System
I.C.L.	Local Office Project
Infologistix	Capacity Planning (North Fylde Central Office)
Jones Lang Wood	Scrutiny of the Social Security Regional Organisation
Logica	Aggregate Performance Indicators
Logica	Scrutiny of the Social Security Regional Organisation
L.B.M.S.	Quality Assurance
M.O.M.	Program Information Control—Artemis
M.F.T.	Federal Budgetary Control System
NESCO	Local Office Project
OASIS	Superannuation Study (North Fylde Central Office)
Oxford Centre for Management Studies	Workload Experiment
PACTEL	Information Centre (Prototype)
P.E. Computer Services	Local Office Project
Peat Marwick McLintock	Analysis of Questionnaires for Scrutiny of Overseas Branch and for Contributions and Compliance Study
Peat Marwick McLintock	Performance Based Systems
Peat Marwick McLintock	Integrated Complementing System

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Price Waterhouse	Financial Management
Price Waterhouse	Integrated Complementing System
Price Waterhouse	Disaster Planning
Price Waterhouse	Career Development
Price Waterhouse	Integrated Complementing System
Protocol	Service Management (North Fylde Central Office)
Resources	Local Office Project
R.E.L.	Tempest Testing
Rowe and Maw	Model Rules for Guaranteed Minimum Pensions in Occupational Pension Schemes
S.B.S.	National Unemployment Benefit System
Scopec	Program Information Controls
S.D.S.	Local Office Project
Slaughter and May	Model Rules for Guaranteed Minimum Pensions in Occupational Pension Schemes
Systems Designers	Performance Based Systems Regional Trials
Task Force	Local Office Project
Task Force	Monitoring Income Support
Task Force	National Unemployment Benefit System
Telfast	Local Office Project
Touche Ross	Recovery of Social Security Benefits from Tort Damage Awards
Touche Ross	Performance Based Systems
Touche Ross	Financial Information Strategy Study
Touche Ross	Integrated Complementing System
V.N.G.	Local Office Project
W.S. Atkins	Communications Wiring Building Survey

Community Care

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what percentage of total budget of the Neasden integrated local office has been spent on community care grants;

(2) how many community care grant applications have been made and refused at the Neasden integrated local office;

(3) how much has been allocated for the 1989-90 budget from the social fund for community care grants at the Neasden integrated local office;

(4) how many social fund loans applications have been made and refused at the Neasden integrated local office.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the numbers of applications for social fund loans and grants processed and awarded, listed by local office, including information on budget allocations and expenditure, may be obtained from the details held in the Library.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the assumptions and bases on which the social fund community care grants budgets for the Department of Social Security ILOs of Redcar, Eston, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Stockton were set for the year 1989-90; and if he will give the reasons why four of these offices have received a lower budget than for the current financial year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The note that I placed in the Library on 22 February in response to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) at column *682* explains the basis on which the social fund allocations for 1988-89 were made.

The combined effect of the three components in the allocation formula ((i) 1988-89 allocations; (ii) income support caseload; (iii) value of awards and the estimated value of refusals for budgetary reasons) means that some offices will gain in 1989-90 in comparison with their 1988-89 allocations and some will lose.

The allocation formula was applied in the same way to all local offices.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider reducing the minimum award of social fund community care grant and budgeting loan payments in respect of fuel reconnection charges, in order to bring the minimum social fund awards into line with the typical reconnection charge.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No, we believe that the existing arrangements already provide the necessary help.

People on income support are provided with a sum of money within which to budget for their everyday needs, in the same way as others on low incomes. Budgeting loans and community care grants are intended to help with larger items of expenditure. We consider £30 a reasonable sum for a person to accumulate from their benefit.

If a person runs into difficulties in meeting his fuel bills the Department can arrange to pay a certain amount of his income support direct to the fuel board so as to avoid disconnection. Where, however, a disconnection has taken place help is available in the form of a crisis loan which may be made if it is the only means of avoiding a risk to health and safety.

Claim Forms

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements have been made for local authorities and advice groups to receive bulk copies of his Department's claim forms.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no arrangements for local authorities and advice groups to receive bulk copies of the Department's claim forms. All claim forms are readily available from the Department's local offices. Additionally, those for family credit and income support can be obtained from Post Offices. Social fund application form SF100, (maternity payment) is available from ante-natal clinics, and SF200 (funeral payment) is available from registrars.

Kidney Failure (Benefits)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits a person who suffers kidney failure and is forced to give up work will currently receive; what level of benefits applied to a person in a similar situation before April 1988; what special allowances existed for items, including food, heating, laundry and baths for such people before April 1988; and what equivalent benefits are now available.

Mr. Scott: People who become incapable of work due to kidney failure whose contract of service with their employer continues would usually be entitled to statutory sick pay from the fourth consecutive day of incapacity. Where the employment terminates, the person is self-employed, or statutory sick pay is not payable for any reason, sickness benefit would be payable instead, provided that the usual contribution conditions were satisfied. After 28 weeks of incapacity, invalidity benefit replaces sickness benefit automatically. It would also replace statutory sick pay in cases where the contribution conditions for sickness benefit would have been satisfied at the beginning of the incapacity. In addition to these benefits, people suffering with renal failure who require help dialysing for at least two occasions a week, either at home, as an in-patient in a private hospital or in a self-care unit may qualify for lower rate attendance allowance. There has been no change in the level of any of these benefits since April 1988 other than the usual uprating.

Depending on their circumstances people with renal failure may also receive income support, which replaced supplementary benefit in April 1988. The level of supplementary benefit paid reflected the individual's circumstances such as size of family, if any, housing costs, special needs, and other income. There was no fixed level of benefit for any claimant. The only special allowance particular to people with renal failure was a dietary addition. All other special allowances, for example, for heating, laundry and baths were available to all claimants on the same terms. The system of special allowances has been replaced by one of flat rate premiums. The disability premium is available to people receiving attendance allowance, mobility allowance or supplement, invalidity benefit or severe disablement benefit. It is also available to people with an invalid carriage, those registered blind and those incapable of work for 28 weeks or more. In addition attendance allowance recipients who live alone qualify for the severe disability premium, providing no-one is receiving invalid care allowance for their care.

Young People (Benefits)

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what effects of the changes to young people's benefits, introduced in April and September 1988, his Department is monitoring;

(2) how his Department is monitoring the effects of the 1988 benefits changes on young people aged 16 and 17 years and 18 to 24 years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Department is monitoring all the effects of the 1988 benefit changes on young people through the usual statistical sources, and through representations made by local authorities, voluntary organisations and other groups concerned with young people. As a result of his monitoring a package of measures to assist those of this group identified as having particular difficulties was announced in my hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) on 13 March at columns *27-28*.

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the latest estimates of *(a)* how many young people aged 16 and 17 years have applied for discretionary payments of income support in order to avoid severe hardship, *(b)* how many young people have been awarded such payments, *(c)* what is the average time taken from the point of application to the point of payment of such awards and *(d)* what is the average duration of such awards.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During the period 12 September 1988, when general entitlement to income support was withdrawn from 16 and 17-year-olds, to 23 March 1989 a total of 6,027 decisions were made under the Secretary of State's discretionary power to avoid severe hardship. A direction to enable income support to be paid was given in 3,908 instances. These figures relate to the number of decisions made, not to the number of young people involved. Some young people have made more than one application. Processing times are not available for these cases separately from other income support claims, but the

commitment to make decisions within 24 hours of the full details of the case being referred to headquarters has been met. The length of direction given in each case is normally linked to an estimate of when a YTS place is likely to be available for the young person concerned. Information to calculate the average durations of directions is not collected.

Income Support

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances single parents in receipt of income support have to make themselves available for work; and whether he has any plans to require that single parents in receipt of income support whose youngest child reaches the age of 12 years will have to make themselves available for work.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Single parents claiming income support have to be available for work only if there is no child under 16 living as a member of the household. We have no plans to change that.

AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether people with HIV on income support qualify for any specific benefits related to the needs caused by their HIV antibody status;

(2) if he is intending to review the six month qualification period necessary to receive the disability premium for people with HIV infection on income support.

Mr. Scott: People whose HIV antibody status renders them incapable of work can qualify for the income support disability premiums on the same basis as all other sick and disabled people. There are no benefits specifically for people with HIV. But those who receive payments from the Macfarlane trust receive the full benefit of such payments, which are disregarded in the calculation of their income support entitlement. We have given a commitment to review the qualifying conditions for the disability, and other, premiums in the light of our continued monitoring of the scheme and the results of the OPCS surveys into disabilities.

Nursing Homes (Elderly People)

Mr. Lord: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to reduce the gap between Government funds provided for elderly residents of nursing homes and the cost of their accommodation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 21 March 1989]:* Under income support, payments can be made to people in nursing homes to help them meet the fees, subject to maximum limits.

From 10 April the limits are being increased. Elderly people in nursing homes will be able to claim up to £190 per week, or up to £213 in London, plus a personal expenses allowance of £10·05.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Water Privatisation

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for the privatisation of water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Government have no present plans to privatise water supplies in Northern Ireland.

Queen's University

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many part-time courses are available at Queen's university, Belfast.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of 590 part-time courses were available during the 1987-88 academic year.

Goat Milk

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce measures to control the standard of hygiene of goat milk production.

Mr. Viggers: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland will shortly be issuing an agreed code of practice on the hygienic production of goats' milk.

Life Imprisonment

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist prisoners serving sentences of life imprisonment or at the Secretary of State's pleasure have been reviewed since January 1988; and how many have been released.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Indeterminate sentence prisoners reviewed, recommended for release and released since January 1988 by believed paramilitary affiliation at the time of their offence

	Number
'Loyalist' cases reviewed	106
Number recommended for release	52
'Republican' cases reviewed	86
Number recommended for release	40
'Loyalist' prisoners released	19
'Republican' prisoners released	8

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* republican and *(b)* loyalist prisoners serving sentences of life imprisonment or at the Secretary of State's pleasure who have been reviewed and put back for further review are to be reconsidered in (i) one, (ii) two, (iii) three, (iv) four and (v) five years.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Indeterminate sentence prisoners who have been reviewed by the life sentence review board and deferred to be reconsidered in 1-5 years from the time of the last review. By believed paramilitary affiliation at time of offence

	0–1 Year	1–2 Years	2–3 Years	3–4 Years	4–5 Years
Republican	13	15	14	14	32
Loyalist	4	18	14	18	10

Wildlife Poisoning

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of the last five years the number of cases of wildlife poisoning in Northern Ireland caused by the illegal use of pesticides or poisons; and if he will identify the species involved and if possible the poison or pesticide involved.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland is not aware of any cases of wildlife poisoning where the illegal use of pesticides or poisons has been proven.

However, in 1986 the death of one peregrine falcon was probably caused by high levels of the pesticides DDT and DDE. In 1986 another peregrine falcon and a sparrowhawk died, possibly through ingesting pesticides, and in 1987 a further sparrowhawk died from what may have been the same cause. In these cases it is not possible to state how or where the birds ingested these substances.

Neither DDT nor DDE were illegal prior to 1 January 1988 when the Control of Pesticides Regulations (NI) 1987 came into operation.

A case earlier this year of about 100 feral pigeons dying through ingesting alpha-chloralose (a stupefying bait) is being investigated. The deliberate use of alpha-chloralose against wild birds is illegal except under licence.

Social Security Payments

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many families in Northern Ireland were in receipt of family income supplement in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Needham: The number was 14,415 families at 1 March 1988.

Elderly People (Residential Homes)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will call for a report from the Department of Health and Social Services for Northern Ireland on the extent to which social security payments and state pensions are adequate to meet the costs of elderly people in private residential homes; and as to the extent of the practice of using residents' pocket money to meet the extra costs of staying in such homes.

Mr. Needham: Information is not held centrally about the numbers of residents in private homes for persons in need whose charges exceed the amounts of their benefits and who may use their personal expenses allowance towards the excess. From 10 April 1989, the relevant income support limits will range from £140 to £200 a week.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the average income of an elderly person in a residential home in Northern Ireland, excluding any private source of income.

Mr. Needham: None.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest available information that he has as to the costs of maintaining a resident in *(a)* a private residential home for the elderly in Northern Ireland, *(b)* a residential home for the elderly run by a social services board and *(c)* a private nursing home in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Information is available only on *(b)* the average cost, excluding capital and central administration costs, being some £162 a week in the year ended 31 March 1988.

Rates

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average percentage increase in the regional rates levied by the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Needham: The regional rate, which is struck by the Department of Finance and Personnel each February, has increased as follows in each of the last three years.

	Per cent.
1987-88	2·9
1988-89	7·98
1989-90	12·63

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average percentage increase in rates struck by district councils in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Needham: The average percentage increase in rates struck by district councils in Northern Ireland over the last three years is as follows:

	Per cent.
1987-88	4·98
1988-89	4·26
1989-90	2·36

Married Teachers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for how long married women teachers have been paying exactly the same contributions from salary as married male teachers for pension and benefit purposes.

Dr. Mawhinney: All teachers, whether male or female, married or single, have paid similar basic percentage contributions since the introduction of the teachers' superannuation scheme in the 1920s.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether contributions for pensions and benefits already paid by married women teachers prior to 6 April 1988 require to be supplemented by buying back all or part of previous service to provide equality of pension and benefit provision for a widower with that to which the widow of a teacher is entitled.

Dr. Mawhinney: Married women teachers may, by making the appropriate payments, have all or part of their service prior to 6 April 1988 counted for widowers' pension purposes.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show for each year from 1976 to 1988, the number of *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* rifles, *(c)* handguns, *(d)* air and gas-powered weapons held on firearms certificates in Northern Ireland or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	*(a) Shotguns*	*(b) Rifles*	*(c) Handguns*	*(d) Air Weapons*
1976	67,148	13,877	10,189	11,830
1977	69,525	13,914	10,322	12,112
1978	71,119	13,834	9,978	12,491
1979	72,843	13,839	9,946	13,362
1980	74,836	13,550	10,257	14,450
1981	76,087	13,765	10,184	15,103
1982	77,392	13,691	10,288	15,635
1983	78,587	13,691	10,246	16,071
1984	79,845	13,654	10,188	16,659
1985	81,247	13,642	10,238	17,240
1986	82,601	13,596	10,427	17,701
1987	82,554	13,414	10,566	17,858
1988	82,913	13,321	10,752	18,114

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many *(a)* police officers by rank and *(b)* civilian staff by grade have been engaged at police headquarters in processing firearms certificates for each year since 1976 to the latest available date; what has been the total costs of remunerating such staff in each year; in each year how many firearms certificates were (i) issued, (ii) renewed, and (iii) varied; how many applications were refused for *(a)* issues of a new certificate, *(b)* renewals and *(c)* variation; and how many certificates were withdrawn.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) Police officers and ranks

	Superintendent	*Chief Inspector*	*Inspector*	*Sergeant*	*Constable*
1976	—	—	—	—	—
1977	—	—	—	—	—
1978	1	1	1	1	1
1979	1	1	1	1	1
1980	1	1	1	1	1
1981	1	1	1	1	1
1982	1	1	1	1	1
1983	1	1	1	1	1
1984	1	1	1	1	1
1985	1	1	1	1	1
1986	1	1	1	1	1
1987	1	1	1	1	1
1988	1	1	1	1	1

Note: Figures are not available for 1976 and 1977.

Pay

Year[1]	*Salaries (£'000s)*	*Overtime and Allowances (£'000s)*	*Superannuation and ERNI (£'000s)*	*Total Cost of Remuneration (£'000s)*
1976-77	64·3	19·8	21·5	105·6
1977-78	72·3	15·3	24·6	112·2
1978-79	98·6	16·1	31·7	146·4
1979-80	102·8	14·5	32·9	150·2
1980-81	132·2	17·2	41·9	191·3
1981-82	143·2	17·2	45·2	205·6
1982-83	159·8	26·4	51·2	237·4
1983-84	181·0	28·2	59·5	268·7
1984-85	183·1	34·1	61·3	278·5
1985-86	243·8	30·6	75·9	350·3
1986-87	272·1	24·3	83·4	379·8
1987-88	315·0	26·9	90·7	432·6

[1] Pay calculated on basis of financial year, 1 April to 31 March.

Year	*(i) Firearm Certificates Granted*	*(ii) Firearm Certificates Renewed*	*(iii) Firearm Certificates Varied*
1976	5,116	15,361	9,283
1977	5,484	13,065	9,539
1978	4,318	28,710	6,465
1979	4,389	19,121	10,278
1980	4,362	14,201	8,934
1981	3,639	29,704	9,140
1982	4,297	21,685	9,246
1983	3,714	17,016	7,748
1984	4,011	30,066	8,574
1985	4,222	22,463	7,082
1986	3,895	17,933	7,197
1987	3,743	29,296	8,903
1988	3,672	22,164	8,800

Year	(a) Refused to grant new firearm certificate	(b) Refused to renew firearm certificate	(c) Refused to vary firearm certificate	Firearm certificate revoked
1976	281	49	510	192
1977	293	58	504	23
1978	229	48	428	100
1979	267	92	331	101
1980	294	79	387	123
1981	360	79	390	103
1982	377	78	439	124
1983	336	79	389	157
1984	313	88	465	154
1985	326	61	374	178
1986	308	43	320	147
1987	308	53	420	146
1988	262	62	471	148

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many rifles held on firearms certificates in Northern Ireland are of ·22 calibre; and how many are of larger calibre; and how many in each category are held under the condition, possession only.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Total Numbers	Possession only
Rifles of ·22 calibre	12,146	974
Rifles of larger calibre	1,175	786

Note: Figures refer to 31 December 1988.

Special Category Prisoners

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate how many prisoners gave up special category status in each of the past four years; for how many of these prisoners the case went to the life sentence review board within a year of giving up their status; how many reviews these prisoners have had; how many in each year *(a)* were given release dates, *(b)* had their cases referred to the judiciary, and *(c)* had their cases referred back for further review after one year, two years or three years; and how many have been released.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* No fixed sentence prisoners have relinquished their special category status in the last four years. Fifty indeterminate sentence prisoners have relinquished their special category status since March 1985, of whom 28 have been released and 15 either have provisional release dates or are at consultation with the judiciary with a view to setting dates. The remaining seven prisoners all transferred to segregated "Republican" or "Loyalist" wings after relinquishing their special category status and have remained in segregated accommodation. The detailed information requested is set out in the following table.

Year	Numbers relinquishing special category status	Numbers who went to LSRB within 1 year	Number of reviews since relinquishing special category status	Release dates set	Referred to judiciary	Deferred (by number of years) 0–1	1–2	2–3	Numbers released
1985	19	9	6 and 1 review 7 and 2 reviews 1 had 3 reviews 1 had 4 reviews 4 had NIL reviews —see note below	2	12	—	—	—	—
1986	23	6	5 had 1 review 5 had 2 reviews 13 had no reviews —see note below	15	11	5	—	1	3
1987	5	1	1 had 2 reviews 4 had no reviews —see note below	8	10	6	3	—	16
1988-89	3	NIL	None have had a review	8	10	2	3	—	9

Note: The 24 prisoners who relinquished Special Category status in the four years 23 March 1985-22 March 1989 and have not since been reviewed were all recommended for consultation with the judiciary prior to their decision to relinquish Special Category status.

Statistical Staff

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the latest figures for the number of staff presently employed, and the full complement of staff including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in the Northern Ireland Office; if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts; and if he will give the staffing complements by grade, and differentiated between statistical and administrative posts, proposed for 1989-90.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* The Northern Ireland Office has one statistical division which is located in Belfast. The division has a complement of nine, which consists of three specialist grades (one principal economist, one deputy economist, one senior assistant economist) and six administrative grades (two executive officers, two administrative officers, two administrative assistants), a programmer is also attached to the division on loan.

The division is fully up to strength and the complement is not expected to change in the foreseeable future.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total fees paid out by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and each year to date; and what is the estimate for the current year.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* The information for 1979-80 to 1983-84 is available throughout Northern Ireland Departments only at disproportionate cost. Information for the year 1984-85 to date is as follows:

	£
1984-85	2,352,311
1985-86	2,427,200
1986-87	2,742,192
1987-88	3,363,213
1988-89	[1]3,273,430

[1] Estimate.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Finance and Personnel jointly shared the cost of a review of the Northern Ireland information services carried out in 1988. The review cost approximately £8,000.

Wages Councils

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* *(a)* the number and percentage of establishments and services covered by wages councils in 1979 and 1988, (i) by wages council and (ii) nationally, *(b)* the number, and percentage of register, of establishments and workers (i) checked by all methods and (ii) visited and the number and percentage in (i) and (ii) found to be illegally underpaying, nationally and by wages council, *(c)* the number and percentage of registers of establishments found to be illegally underpaying and prosecuted in each year from 1979 to 1988, and *(d)* the number of inspectors employed by wages council and nationally, in each year from 1979 to 1988.

Mr. Viggers *[holding answer 22 March 1989]:* The information requested is:

(a) The number and percentage of establishments covered by wages councils in Northern Ireland in 1979 and 1988 are as follows:

Wages Council	*1979*	*Per cent.*	*1988*	*Per cent.*
Baking	255	4·0	341	4·4
Boot and Shoe Repairing	29	0·5	100	1·3
Catering	3,825	60·6	4,469	57·9
Clothing Manufacturing	—	—	171	2·2
Dressmaking and Women's Light Clothing[1]	122	2·0	—	—
Laundry	17	0·3	15	0·2
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household goods and Linen Piece goods	84	1·3	49	0·6
Paper Box	17	0·3	17	0·2
Ready made and Wholesale Bespoke[1] Tailoring	58	0·9	—	—
Retail Bespoke Tailoring[2]	4	0·1	—	—
Road Haulage	1,756	27·8	2,536	32·8
Shirtmaking[1]	85	1·3	—	—
Sugar Confectionery and Food Preserving	55	0·9	29	0·4
Northern Ireland Totals	6,307	100	7,727	100

[1] These wages councils were abolished in 1982 and one new wages councils (Clothing Manufacturing Wages Council) was established in their place.

[2] This wages council was abolished in 1981.

(b) (i) The number, and percentage of register, of establishments checked in 1988 and those found to be underpaying are as follows:

Wages Council	*Establishments*					
	Number checked by all methods	*Per cent. of register*	*Number checked by visit*	*Per cent. of register*	*Number found to be underpaying*	*Per cent. of register*
Baking	78	22·9	78	22·9	16	4·7
Boot and shoe repairing	21	21·0	21	21·0	1	1·0
Catering	583	13·0	488	10·9	68	1·5
Clothing manufacturing	27	15·8	27	15·8	12	7·0
Laundry	6	40·0	6	40·0	—	—
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	19	38·8	19	38·8	2	4·1
Paper box	5	29·4	5	29·4	—	—
Road haulage	310	12·2	296	11·7	13	0·5
Sugar confectionery and food preserving	4	13·8	4	13·8	—	—
NORTHERN IRELAND TOTALS	1,053	13·6	944	12·2	112	1·4

(b) (ii) The number, and percentage of register, of workers checked in 1988 and the number found to be underpaid are as follows:

Wages Council	*Workers*					
	Number checked by all methods	*Per cent. of register*	*Number checked by visit*	*Per cent. of register*	*Number found to be underpaying*	*Per cent. of register*
Baking	283	29·5	283	29·5	17	1·8
Boot and shoe repairing	23	30·7	23	30·7	2	2·7
Catering	2,785	17·4	2,385	14·9	104	0·7
Clothing manufacturing	1,537	14·0	1,537	14·0	118	1·1
Laundry	29	10·0	29	10·0	—	—
Linen and cotton handkerchief and household goods and linen piece goods	612	46·5	612	46·5	2	0·2
Paper box	217	25·2	217	25·2	—	—
Road haulage	982	18·2	771	14·3	15	0·3
Sugar confectionery and food preserving	23	14·8	23	14·8	—	—
NORTHERN IRELAND TOTALS	6,491	18·0	5,880	16·3	258	0·7

(c) The number and percentage of register of establishments found to be underpaying since 1982 are as follows:

Wages Council	*1982*		*1983*		*1984*		*1985*		*1986*		*1987*		*1988*	
	Number	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Baking	12	4·8	8	3·0	5	1·9	11	4·0	14	3·3	9	2·4	16	4·7
Boot and Shoe Repairing	1	3·2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1·0
Catering	16	0·5	17	0·5	32	1·0	28	0·9	35	0·8	76	1·5	68	1·5
Clothing Manufacturing	—	—	—	—	4	2·9	1	0·8	6	4·7	10	5·4	12	7·0
Dressmaking and Women's Light Clothing[1]	—	—	1	1·9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Laundry	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	8·3	1	7·1	—	—
Linen and Cotton Handkerchief and Household Goods and Linen Piece Goods	—	—	—	—	1	2·0	—	—	1	2·2	2	4·2	2	4·1
Paper Bfox	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Ready Made and Wholesale Bespoke[1] Tailoring	—	—	1	3·3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Road Haulage	9	0·6	6	0·4	10	0·8	5	0·4	7	0·4	6	0·3	13	0·5
Shirtmaking[1]	—	—	1	2·0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sugar Confectionery and Food Preserving	1	2·4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Northern Ireland Totals	39	0·7	34	0·7	52	1·0	45	0·9	64	0·9	104	1·3	112	1·4

Notes:
These Wages Councils were abolished in 1982 and one new Wages Council (Clothing Manufacturing Wages Council) was established in their place.
Figures are not available for the period prior to 1982. There have been no prosecutions in this period.

(d) Since 1979 there have been two wages inspectors employed to enforce wages councils orders in Northern Ireland.

Royal Ulster Constabulary-Gardai Meetings

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether meetings between officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Gardai about border security take place, turn about, at rendezvous north and south of the Border; and how many meetings have taken place since the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Meetings take place frequently both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, but no record is kept of the number of meetings which have taken place.

Election Expenses

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing how much a candidate may expend for election purposes in the local government elections this year for each district electoral area in each council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Stewart: No. As in the rest of the United Kingdom it is for individual candidates to satisfy themselves that their expenses are kept within the limits prescribed.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 5 April 1989

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Darling: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list for each regional appeal adjudicator the number of immigration appeals lodged and awaiting hearing as at 28 February and at the latest available date; and in each case if he will indicate the average length by time between the lodging of the appeal and its being heard.

The Attorney-General: Appeals to the immigration appellate authorities are not assigned to individual adjudicators at the regional centres. The table indicates the number of appeals lodged and awaiting hearing listing at each regional centre, including Thanet house, on 29 March 1989. The IAAs do not record the number of appeals awaiting hearing on a daily basis and it is not possible to give figures for 28 February 1989.

Appeals against decisions of Immigration Officers and the Secretary of State
Lodged and Awaiting Hearing (29 March 1989)

	Number
Birmingham	60
Harmondsworth	116
Leeds	47
Manchester	29
Thanet House	783

Appeals against decisions of Entry Clearance Officers
Lodged and Awaiting Hearing (29 March 1989)

	Number
Birmingham	245
Harmondsworth	396
Leeds	192
Manchester	259
Thanet House	500

Note: The figures above refer to the number of cases rather than appeals because related appeals are often dealt with together.

The average length of time between the lodging and hearing of an appeal, which is the same for all IAA centres, is as follows:

(a) From receipt of the notice of appeal to despatch to the IAA:—
  (i) For appeals against ECO decisions—3 to 6 months;
  (ii) For appeals against Immigration Officer decisions—6 weeks;
  (iii) For appeals against Secretary of State decisions—5 to 6 months.

(b) From receipt of the notice of appeal by the IAA to (i) registration in Immigration Officer and Secretary of State cases—up to 4 weeks; (ii) despatch of the appeal papers in other cases to both parties' representatives in the UK—4 to 8 weeks.

(c) From receipt of papers by both parties' representatives (in appeals against ECO decisions) to the issue by each party of a certificate of readiness to proceed: this is the hands of the parties and times vary from a few weeks to several months and, if no response is received within nine months, the appeal is automatically listed for hearing.

(d) From certificate of readiness to proceed to the hearing date: up to 6 weeks, but longer where the parties request adjournment.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Attorney-General, if the Lord Chancellor has any proposals to amend the rules governing the operation of immigration appeal tribunals; and what consultations he has held in that regard.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has no proposals at present to amend the rules governing the operation of the immigration appellate authorities. Officials of his Department regularly consult, and are consulted by, officials of the Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the operation of the IAAs. These consultations will continue.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Attorney-General how many immigration appeals are currently awaiting hearing; and what is the average time between lodging an appeal and its being heard.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is as follows:

(i) Number of cases waiting to be listed in appeals to the adjudicators against immigration officer/Secretary of State decisions.—48
(ii) Number of cases already listed in appeals to the adjudicators against immigration officer and Secretary of State decisions.—987
(iii) Number of cases awaiting to be listed in appeals to the adjudicators against ECO decisions.—175
(iv) Number of cases already listed in appeals to the adjudicators against ECO decisions.—1,417
(v) Number of cases waiting to be listed in appeals to the immigration appeal tribunal (at the end of February 1989).—150
(vi) Number of cases already listed in appeals to the IAT (at the end of February 1989).—100

The figures above refer to the number of cases rather than appeals because related appeals are often dealt with together.

For the average time between lodging an appeal and it being heard, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to his question on the average time between the lodging and hearing of appeals by adjudicators in the regions.

Child Criminals

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases of victims suing the parents of child criminals were brought to court during each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The data requested are not available.

NATIONAL FINANCE

National Debt

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will give the total of borrowings as an addition to the national debt by each Government since 1959;

(2) if he will give the total net repayments of national debt for each Government since 1959.

Mr. Lilley: Figures for public sector borrowing and net repayment for each Government since 1959 are given below:

£ billion

Period	Total	Annual Average
1959-63	3·4	0·7
1964-65 to 1969-70	4·8	0·8
1970-71 to 1973-74	8·5	2·1
1974-75 to 1978-79	41·1	8·2
1979-80 to 1988-89	51·5	5·1

Note:

Borrowing is shown as positive, however there were net repayments in 1969-70, 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Civil Service Staff

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 January.

Mr. Major: On 1 January 1989 there were 571,649½ staff in post in central Government Departments. Of these 500,981½ were non-industrials and 70,668 were industrials.

Paris Club

Mr. Moss: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the amount of debt which has been rescheduled by creditor Governments in the Paris Club; and what is the extent of rescheduling by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lawson: The Paris Club brings together official creditors and debtors, to agree terms for the rescheduling of payments due on officially supported export credits and development loans. During the period 1982-88, the club estimates that it has rescheduled a total of US$83 billion (£48 billion at the current exchange rate). Of this, $56 billion was principal and $27 billion was interest. The United Kingdom share was about £5 billion. In addition, the United Kingdom cancelled £79 million of old aid loans, about £890 million having already been written off in 1978-81.

Investment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rate of return required on new investment in the nationalised industries and the discount rate used for appraising investment in other parts of the public sector.

Mr. Major: The Government have reviewed the level and use of discount rates in the public sector. These were last reviewed in 1978. Since then the rate of return in the private sector has risen to around 11 per cent.

In the light of this, the Government have decided to raise the required rate of return for nationalised industries and public sector trading organisations from 5 per cent. to 8 per cent. in real terms before tax. The new required rate of return of 8 per cent. will be an important factor in setting new financial targets, but there will be no impact on pricing during the life of existing financial targets.

As at present, the choice of the discount rate to appraise individual projects is a matter for individual nationalised industries or trading bodies to decide in consultation with sponsor Departments and the Treasury. The Government's main concern will continue to be that the industries' approach should be compatible with achieving the required rate of return on the programme as a whole. In appraising whether or not new capital investment projects should be undertaken, proper attention will need to be paid to risk. The effect of full allowance for risk will often be implicitly equivalent to requiring a higher internal rate of return on riskier projects.

The Government have decided that the discount rate to be used in the non-trading part of the public sector should be based on the cost of capital for low-risk purposes in the private sector. In current conditions this indicates a rate not less than 6 per cent. in real terms. Risk will be analysed separately and projects (and options) which are more risky will be required to demonstrate correspondingly lower costs or higher benefits.

These proposals will ensure that the appraisal of public projects will be no less demanding in the non-trading sector than in the trading sector, both public and private. In particular, they will provide a comparable basis for the consideration of private participation in public sector activities by taking account of the full economic cost of the public sector option.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Quangos

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many departmental agencies or authorities have been created since 1979; if he will list organisations abolished since 1979; and how many personnel his Department appoints to quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Forth: Since 1979 the following executive non-departmental public bodies have been abolished within the field of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's present responsibilities:

British Film Fund Agency
Cotton Industry War Memorial Trust
Furniture Development Council
Metrication Board
National Film Finance Corporation
Price Commission

Additionally, the number of nationalised industry consumer councils has fallen from 43 to 33 in consequence of privatisation. Apart from a restructuring of some of these, no new executive bodies have been created. The particulars of members appointed by the Secretary of State to all non-departmental public bodies for which he is responsible are shown in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1988." The staff of executive bodies are appointed by the bodies themselves.

Company Accounts

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is his policy towards the draft EEC fourth directive and the proposal to exempt small and medium-sized companies from having to lodge their annual accounts with a central registry.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The Department has issued a consultative document on the draft directive amending the fourth company law directive. A copy was placed in the Library of this House in February. We have specifically invited comments on the proposal to permit small companies to make their accounts available at their registered offices rather than having to file them at a central registry. Policy will be determined in the light of responses received.

TRANSPORT

Quangos

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations were abolished by his Department between 1984 and 1987.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Three: the disciplinary inquiry under section 471 of the Merchant Shipping Act, 1984; the honorary medical advisory panel for driving and disorders of the nervous system; and the air travel reserve fund agency.

Aircraft Safety

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has any plans to require evacuation tests from aircraft to be conducted under conditions where smoke has entered the cabin for all types of aircraft; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if it is his intention to make the installation of a water spray fire suppression system for aircraft, mandatory for all new and existing passenger transport aircraft registered in the United Kingdom as soon as such equipment has been approved by the Civil Aviation Authority; and if he will make a statement;

(3) when he expects the review of British civil airworthiness requirements concerning unobstructed access of exits on Boeing 737 aircraft will be completed; if the report will be published; and if he will make a statement;

(4) if he has any plans to require airlines to remove all passenger seats blocking emergency exits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: These civil aviation safety regulation issues are wholly the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. The authority's current position on them is set out in its follow-up action on accident reports (FACTAR) issued on 13 March 1989 in response to the AAIB report on the B737 accident at Manchester, 22 August 1985. I have arranged for a copy of the FACTAR to be sent to my hon. Friend. I understand that the authority will shortly publish the initial report on the research it has undertaken into evacuation requirements.

Bus Safety

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress on improving bus safety and to reduce the dangers of bus doors to elderly people.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are distributing for comment draft regulations which would require all power-operated doors in new buses and coaches to be provided with safety devices to prevent people being trapped in the doors as the bus moves off. If the doors close on to a passenger they will be required to re-open, or release the passenger. A warning light would be required to be fitted to inform the driver whenever the doors were not fully closed.

We hope that these measures will lead to further improvements in the very good safety record of buses and coaches.

The draft regulations also contain amendments to remove unnecessary restrictions on the provision of facilities for passengers in wheelchairs.

We are also proposing to allow more time for coach manufacturers to bring their designs up to the requirements of ECE regulation 66, the United Nations standard for strength of superstructure. We have already made regulations to adopt this standard as a national requirement with effect from April 1990.

Coach manufacturers have made conspicuous improvements in this area. There has not been a reported death due to roof collapse in Great Britain during the last five years.

Discussions with other member states have shown that it is still uncertain what form the European Community requirements for coach construction will take in the new single market, particularly in this area. In the circumstances we think it is right to postpone our national requirement for three years to give time for the future European Community requirements to become settled.

M1-A1 Link

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the consequences for the road user and others affected by the M1-A1 link road scheme of the delay which resulted from the challenges in the High Court and the Appeal Court to the orders for the Catthorpe to Rothwell section of the scheme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The unsuccessful challenge by the Society for the Preservation of the Battlefield of Naseby has delayed progress by about a year. As a result the cost will increase. Benefits to road users, principally journey time savings, valued at about £7 million, will be lost.

The delay has meant that safety benefits have been forgone, of the order of three fatalities and 100 personal injury accidents. Relief from traffic for communities on nearby roads has been postponed.

PRIME MINISTER

Economic Statistics

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Prime Minister if she will publish the report of the review on Government economic statistics; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Following the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's report on the 1988 Budget, the Government set up an efficiency scrutiny in the Cabinet Office last June to examine the present interdepartmental arrangements for the production of Government economic statistics, and to make recommendations for achieving cost-effective improvements where necessary. The report of this scrutiny is being published today, and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The scrutiny report recommends a large number of specific ways of improving the quality of Government economic statistics, the great bulk of which have been accepted. They will be implemented over the next year under the supervision of the director of the Central Statistical Office. Copies of the action plan relating to these recommendations have been placed in the Library of the House.

The report also makes a number of recommendations for changes to the present interdepartmental arrangements for producing economic statistics. In accordance with these, I have decided that from July responsibility for the business statistics office and for all the statistical series for which the Department of Trade and Industry is now

responsible, and for the retail prices index and family expenditure survey, for which the Department of Employment is currently responsible, should transfer to the Central Statistical Office. The enlarged Central Statistical Office will have greater direct responsibility for the compilation of the national accounts and for the associated data collection from businesses.

As recommended by the scrutiny report, the enlarged Central Statistical Office will become a separate Government Department, responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and in due course will also become an executive agency. The director of the Central Statistical Office, as head of the Government statistical service, will continue to have access to me on matters concerning the validity and integrity of Government statistics.

The Government remain committed to reducing the burdens on business involved in the collection of economic statistics. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has lead responsibility for deregulation policy, will therefore agree with the enlarged Central Statistical Office specific objectives to ensure that the burdens on business are minimised.

These decisions amount to a very substantial programme of work over the period ahead, designed to achieve a significant improvement in the quality and relevance of Government economic statistics.

DEFENCE

Colombia

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when next he plans to meet his counterpart from Colombia; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the Colombian Minister of Defence.

Meteorological Office (Computer)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on problems encountered by the Meteorological Office computer bought from Control Data Corporation of Minneapolis.

Mr. Sainsbury: There have been some delays in commissioning the ETA-10 super-computer, caused by difficulties in the performance of its data packages. However, recent demonstrations show a satisfactory improvement, and the current intention is to phase the new computer into service starting in May 1989.

St. George's Barracks, Sutton Coldfield

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is planned for military use of St. George's barracks, Sutton Coldfield, west midlands, to cease; and what present plans he has for its disposal.

Mr. Neubert: The major occupant of St. George's barracks, Sutton Coldfield is the Army personnel selection centre, which is to close in April 1990. There is, however, a continuing requirement to accommodate military units in this area and we are examining the need to retain most of St. George's barracks for this purpose.

WALES

General Practitioners

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for general practitioner practices in Wales the following information: *(a)* the difference between the highest and lowest referral rate to hospital, *(b)* the highest and lowest cost per patient for prescribed drugs and *(c)* the highest and lowest percentage of general practitioner prescribed drugs which are tranquillisers.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information is not readily available in the form requested. I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Potato Marketing Board

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many representations he has received from residents of Pembrokeshire in response to his review of the future of the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Peter Walker: Two.

Milk Quota

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what movement into and out of Wales of milk quota has taken place in each of the past five years in both litres and percentage terms.

Mr. Peter Walker: Movement of quota in and out of Wales as recorded by the Milk Marketing Board in each of the past five years has been as follows:

Year	*In*	*Out*	*Net gain or loss*	*Gain or loss as percentage of total quota in Wales*
1984-85	+0·4m litres	−0·1m litres	+0·3m litres	+0·02
1985-86	+2·4m litres	−4·5m litres	−2·1m litres	−0·1
1986-87	+7·0m litres	−23·1m litres	−16·1m litres	−1·1
1987-88	+10·6m litres	−18·9m litres	−8·3m litres	−0·5
1988-89 (to 16 March)	+7·0m litres	−11·1m litres	−4·1m litres	−0·3

HEALTH

Geriatric Beds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals with long-stay geriatric beds, and the numbers of such beds provided by each district health authority within the Trent regional health authority; if the scale of provision is under review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information on bed numbers is not available in the form requested and for that reason the

table relates to beds in general wards for elderly patients. I understand the region is currently reviewing its strategy for the provision of services for the elderly.

Average daily available beds, general wards[1] for elderly patients, Trent Regional Health Authority, 1987-88

District Health Authority and Hospital	*Average daily available beds*
North Derbyshire	
Bolsover Community Hospital	10
Whitworth Hospital	24
Bakewell and District War Memorial Hospital	13
Scarsdale Hospital	45
Walton Hospital	138
Penmore Hospital	60
Newholme Hospital	49
Cavendish Hospital	51
Total	390
South Derbyshire	
Derby City Hospital	60
Ripley Hospital	24
St. Oswald's Hospital	63
Ilkeston Community Hospital	14
Babington Hospital	99
Manor Hospital	160
Derbyshire Royal Infirmary	59
The Grove	70
Total	549
Leicestershire	
Leicester General Hospital	201
St. Mary's Hospital	74
St. Luke's Hospital	52
Framland Hospital	36
Catmose Vale Hospital	42
Groby Road Hospital	89
Regent Hospital	65
Glenfield Community Hospital	166
Bosworth Park Infirmary	63
Hinckley Sunnyside Hospital	38
Blaby Hospital	20
Total	844
North Lincolnshire	
John Coupland Hospital	42
Louth County Hospital	49
St. Georges Hospital	202
Total	293
South Lincolnshire	
Boston General Hospital	21
Holbeach Hospital	22
Pilgrim Hospital	80
Grantham and Kesteven General Hospital	93
Gables Hospital	42
Welland Hospital	58
Total	315
Bassetlaw	
Retford and District Hospital	56
Bassetlaw District General Hospital	75
Total	131
Central Nottinghamshire	
Forest Hospital	71
Newstead Hospital	35
Victoria Hospital	115
Newark Hawtonville Hospital	95
Total	315
Nottingham	
Nottingham City Hospital	181
Basford Hospital	104
Nottingham General Hospital	138
Highbury Hospital	77
University Hospital	109
Total	609
Barnsley	
Barnsley District General Hospital	96
Mount Vernon Hospital	173
Total	269
Doncaster	
Doncaster Royal Infirmary	20
Fullerton Hospital	34
Tickhill Road Hospital	136
Conisborough Hospital	100
Montagu Hospital	21
Total	310
Rotherham	
Rotherham District General Hospital	34
Wathwood Hospital	69
Badsley Moor Lane	163
Total	265
Sheffield	
Northern General Hospital	351
Chapeltown Nursing Home	34
St. Georges Hospital	95
Coleridge House, Northern General Hospital	14
Lodge Moor Hospital	142
Nether Edge Hospital	191
Total	827

[1] Excluding wards open during day only.

Trent RHA

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average times for the following operations in the Trent regional health authority *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* knee replacements, *(c)* hernias, *(d)* cataracts, *(e)* ear, nose and throat, *(f)* varicose veins and *(g)* gynaecological; what were the figures for five and 10 years ago; if he will also list the average waiting times for *(a)* to *(g)* above for the initial out-patient consultation after a general practitioner referral and the comparative figures for five and 10 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Such information as can be provided without incurring disproportionate cost is given in the table. Information on waiting times of out-patient referrals is not available centrally, and the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Trent regional health authority, who may be able to help further.

Estimated median interval in weeks between the time a patient[1] was placed on the waiting list and admission for treatment to an NHS hospital in the Trent RHA area, 1979-87/88.

Specialty	*1979*	*1984*	*[2]1978-88*
Ear, Nose and Throat	18	15	8
Gynaecology	8	6	5

Operation	1979	1984	1985
Total hip replacement and other arthroplasty of hip	42	35	25
Inguinal hernia operation	19	8	11
Operations on eye lens (mainly for cataracts)	19	18	16
Operations on veins (mainly for varicose veins)	26	19	20

[1] Ordinary admission—waiting list cases only.
[2] Latest available year.

AIDS

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take in the light of the minute, "Diet and HIV infection", of 23 February 1988, sent by Dr. P. Dewis to all regional senior medical officers.

Mr. Mellor: Claims for help with the costs of special diets are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any evidence that the routine needs of people with ARC are any greater on the first day of their diagnosis than six months into their infection.

Mr. Mellor: There is no precise and generally agreed definition of the so-called AIDS-related complex (ARC). The natural history of HIV infection includes clinical signs and symptoms which tend to relapse and remit. The needs of people who have the virus will vary from individual to individual over time.

HIV

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department recommends to those people with HIV in order that they protect their immune system.

Mr. Mellor: People who know themselves to have HIV antibodies should seek advice from their doctors, on an individual basis, on the steps they can take to maintain their health.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Vietnam

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will undertake to help strengthen trading links and improved aid flows between the European Community and Vietnam, in the event of a major withdrawal of troops by Vietnam from Kampuchea in 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: Complete withdrawal by Vietnam from its illegal occupation of Cambodia is a crucial prerequisite for considering these questions.

South-West Africa

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to make representations to the South African Government on their policy towards south-west Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: The Prime Minister discussed Namibia when she met the South African Foreign Minister in Windhoek on 1 April. Namibia is regularly raised in our contacts with the South African Government including the meeting between my right hon. and learned Friend and the South African Foreign Minister on 15 March.

Hong Kong

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of China regarding the future of Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: The implementation of the Sino-British joint declaration on the future of Hong Kong was one of the subjects covered in the discussion which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State had with the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs during his visit to Tokyo in February this year and in the discussion which my noble Friend the Minister of State had with the Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs in London on 29 March. We also hold regular discussions with the Chinese authorities on implementation of the joint declaration in the Sino-British joint liaison group, which most recently met in Peking between 14 and 17 March this year.

Namibia

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution the United Kingdom will make to the United Nations transition assistance group in Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) on 21 December 1988 at column *274*. In addition, we have since then further agreed to contribute a seven-man reception assistance team to UNTAG.

Brazilian Debt

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the arrangements for repayment of the Brazilian debt to United Kingdom banks, at what rate of interest, and over what period of time.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the repayment of Brazil's debt to United Kingdom banks is largely determined by the financing agreement they signed in September 1988; under which the majority of Brazil's debt was rescheduled over 20 years with seven years' grace. The interest rate charged will be LIBOR + 13/16 per cent.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total debt of the Brazilian economy to United Kingdom banks.

Mrs. Chalker: Consolidated claims of United Kingdom-registered monetary sector institutions on Brazil are shown in table 15 of the Bank of England quarterly bulletin. The exposure of individual banks is not a matter for the Government.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the Brazilian debt owed to each United Kingdom bank both actual and as a percentage of the total debt.

Mrs. Chalker: Consolidated claims of United Kingdom-registered monetary sector institutions on Brazil are shown in table 15 of the Bank of England quarterly bulletin. The exposure of individual banks is not a matter for the Government.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Turkey in respect of human rights abuses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: As I told the House on 8 February, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and I discussed Turkey's human rights record with the Turkish ambassador on 1 and 2 February. We impressed upon him the need for his Government to abide by the terms and conditions of the human rights conventions to which Turkey is a party. He readily accepted this point and reaffirmed the determination of the Turkish Government to secure further human rights improvements in Turkey.

Ethiopia

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his Department's library a copy of the State Department of the United States' report on Ethiopia as presented by Mr. Richard Schifter at a Congressional hearing in February.

Mrs. Chalker: A copy of the United States State Department's "Country Reports Human Rights Practices for 1988" has already been obtained by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Romania

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the fate of six Romanian citizens who recently signed an open letter to President Ceausescu; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Romanian Government have reacted with characteristic severity to this latest open letter, which calls upon the Romanian President to renounce his "systematisation" programme; to restore constitutional guarantees regarding the rights of citizens; and to put an end to food exports.

These are legitimate requests which merit a proper response. At least three of the six co-signatories, all of whom have held prominent positions in Romanian Government and party circles, have been interrogated by the Romanian authorities. They remain under close surveillance.

We are profoundly disturbed by the Romanian authorities' ever-increasing use of intimidatory tactics to stifle freedom of expression, at a time when other Eastern European countries are moving in the opposite direction. We urge the Romanian authorities to fulfil their commitments under the Vienna CSCE agreement and to respect the human rights of the Romanian people.

Structural Adjustment Programmes

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Malawian sectoral import programme for industrial product imports and the Sudanese sectoral import programme for the irrigated sub-sector were conditional on the acceptance of IBRD and IMF structural adjustment programmes.

Mr. Chris Patten: Approval of the European Community's Malawian sectoral import programme for industrial products was subject to the conditions negotiated by the Malawi Government and the World Bank for the World Bank's industry and trade policy adjustment credit. Approval of the Community's Sudanese sectoral import programme for the irrigated sub-sector was not explicitly conditional on the IBRD-IMF-backed structural adjustment programme which the Sudanese Government were then pursuing.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the remarks, relating to IMF, IBRD and EEC policies towards structural adjustment, made by Lorenzo Natali, EEC Commissioner for Development, to the ACP-EEC joint assembly in Madrid on 15 September 1988.

Mr. Chris Patten: We welcomed a number of the comments made by Señor Natali at the joint assembly, in particular his rejection of the view that the years of adjustment by ACP countries are wasted years for development. However, we continue to take the view that support for economic reform through the provision of programme aid and support for new investments are complementary and both indispensable. No useful purpose is served by establishing a rigid division between the two forms of aid.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many sectoral import programmes have been agreed and with which countries and how many of these agreements and with which countries have been conditional of those countries' acceptance and implementation of IMF or IBRD structural adjustment programmes.

Mr. Chris Patten: Under the third Lomé convention, the European Community has agreed 25 sectoral import programmes. The list of recipients is as follows: Angola, Cameroon, Ethiopia the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar (2), Malawi (2), Mali, Mozambique (2), Niger, Sao Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan (2), Tanzania (2), Togo, Uganda (2) and Zambia. Seven of these programmes have been explicitly linked to the implementation of IMF-IBRD-backed structural adjustment programmes; the countries in question are Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Sao Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda. Many of the other programmes have been in support of adjustment backed by the IMF and IBRD although there has been no explicit linkage.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's view as to what forms of structural adjustment should be included under the fourth ACP-EEC convention (Lomé IV).

Mr. Chris Patten: In line with the development council resolution of 31 May 1988 we believe that under the fourth

ACP-EEC convention fast disbursing aid should be provided to support programmes of both macro-economic and sectoral reform.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's view as to how central the issue of structural adjustment should be under the terms of the fourth African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Economic Community convention, Lomé IV.

Mr. Chris Patten: The extent and depth of the adjustment needed varies considerably among the ACP countries. It is accordingly important to ensure that the Community retains sufficient flexibility to enable it to provide the type of assistance best suited to each country's individual needs.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the view of his Department that all European development fund aid subventions should be made conditional on the adoption of structural adjustment policies.

Mr. Chris Patten: No. However we believe that the economic policies being pursued by recipients should be taken fully into account in considering the form of assistance to be provided. In particular, we believe that programme aid should be made available in order to support sustainable economic policies.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the renegotiation of the fourth African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Economic Community convention, Lomé IV, with specific reference to the European Council resolution on structural adjustment policies, adopted on 31 May 1988.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Community has agreed that in the current renegotiation of the Lomé convention its approach towards support for structural adjustment measures will be on the basis of the principles set out in the development council resolution of 31 May 1988.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy in negotiations for the fourth African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Economic Community convention, Lomé IV, to remain committed to a gradualist form of structural adjustment rather than a shock approach.

Mr. Chris Patten: Economic reform is a necessary pre-condition for the recovery of economic growth in many ACP countries. It is important that it should move ahead as quickly as possible. However we recognise the need to take account of the situation in individual countries.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement as to his Department's attitude to the atachment of structural adjustment conditionalities to fast disbursing facilities, such as sectoral import programmes and general import programmes proposed under the negotiations for the fourth African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Community convention, Lomé IV.

Mr. Chris Patten: We believe that under the next Lomé convention there should be scope for providing the forms of aid best suited to the needs of individual ACP countries, including various forms of relatively fast disbursing programme aid. If such aid is to be effective, it needs to be provided in support of sustainable economic policies and in close co-ordination with other major donors.

Import Programmes

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's attitude to the creation of a new fund, under a renegotiated fourth African, Caribbean and Pacific-European Economic Community convention, to finance sectoral import programmes and general import programmes.

Mr. Chris Patten: The Community is still considering the mechanisms under which it will provide aid under the next convention. Our concern is that sufficient flexibility should be maintained to enable each ACP country to receive the type of aid most suited to its individual needs.

Rain Forests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will call for the United Nations to hold an urgent debate to discuss how to put a stop to the destruction of the rain forests with a package of economic and technical help specifically designed to help all the inhabitants of the rain forests to protect their way of life and their environment.

Mr. Chris Patten: Her Majesty's Government are not planning to initiate a debate in the United Nations General Assembly on this important issue as it already forms part of the United Nations systemwide medium-term environment programme for 1990-95. This programme sets out a plan for the sustainable development of tropical forests and woodland ecosystems. It includes implementation of the tropical forestry action plan, involving close co-operation with the International Tropical Timber Organisation.

Central African Federation Pensioners

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to help Central African Federation pensioners who elected to have their pensions paid in Zambian kwacha and who now suffer hardship as a result of the devaluation of that currency.

Mr. Chris Patten: At the recent intergovernmental meeting in Harare the four guarantor Governments agreed that all Central African Federation pensioners should be allowed to receive payment in Zimbabwe dollars with effect from 1 April 1989. At current exchange rates this will produce increases of about 500 per cent. for pensioners currently paid in Zambia kwacha, and also significant increases for those currently paid in Malawi kwacha and those paid in a basket of the three currencies. The British Government have agreed to finance this change in currency of payment at an estimated cost of £1·5 million.

Mozambique and Zimbabwe

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subjects were

discussed at the recent meeting between the Prime Minister and the President of Mozambique and the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe.

Mrs. Chalker: The Prime Minister had a trilateral meeting with Presidents Mugabe and Chissano followed by a bilateral meeting with President Chissano at Nyanga in Zimbabwe on 29 March. They discussed the internal situation in Mozambique, and British aid and military assistance to the region.

ENVIRONMENT

Urban Programme

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the value of urban programme moneys for each year since 1979 for each of the metropolitan districts in the north-west of England at constant prices.

Mr. Trippier: The urban programme resources for each district are noted in the table.

Urban programme resources in real terms (base year 1988-89)

£ million

	Outturn								*Estimated outturn*	*Allocation*	*Allocation*
	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
North west region											
Bolton	3·1	3·3	3·7	4·0	5·7	3·9	4·6	4·3	4·5	3·8	3·4
Knowsley	—	0·2	0·7	0·5	1·3	3·9	4·0	4·1	4·1	4·0	3·6
Liverpool[1]	23·7	27·9	25·1	33·1	32·2	28·5	24·8	25·4	17·5	20·4	18·4
Manchester/Salford[1]	24·4	27·7	24·2	31·8	30·3	29·1	27·0	25·5	25·9	22·2	20·7
Oldham	3·3	3·9	4·1	5·9	5·7	3·8	4·3	4·1	4·3	3·7	3·4
Rochdale	—	0·9	1·3	2·0	2·7	4·2	4·0	4·1	3·9	3·6	3·4
St. Helens	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·8	1·7	1·6
Sefton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·6	1·5	1·4
Wigan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·3	2·2	2·2
Wirral	3·9	4·2	4·0	6·0	4·5	4·1	4·5	4·8	3·9	3·5	3·1

[1] Are partnership authorities.

Quangos

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environement if he will list the quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations abolished since 1979 within his department; what is the cost of all these organisations for which he is currently responsible; and how many personnel he appoints.

Mr. Ridley: The information requested is listed below:

The quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations for which my Department has been responsible and which have been abolished since 1979, are listed as follows:

Name of body	*Date abolished*
Construction and Housing Research Advisory Council	September 1979
Ordnance Survey Review Committee	September 1979
Planning and Transport Research Advisory Council (PATRAC)	September 1979
Economic Planning Councils (England) (8)	1 September 1979
Ancient Monuments Board Committee for Rescue Archaeology	17 September 1979
Area Archaeological Advisory Committees (13)	17 September 1979
Advisory Committee on Trees in the Royal Parks	17 September 1979
Committee on Bird Sanctuaries in the Royal Parks	17 September 1979
Detergents and Allied Products—Voluntary Notification Scheme, Scrutiny Group	17 September 1979
Environmental Board	17 September 1979
Hadrian's Wall Advisory Committee	17 September 1979
Housing Corporation Advisory Committee on Co-operatives	17 September 1979
Standing Technical Committee on Synthetic Detergents	17 September 1979
Advisory Committee on the Purchase of Works of Art[1]	1 November 1979
Advisory Committee on Works of Art in the House of Commons[1] (transferred to DES (OAL)	1 November 1979
Committee on Sculptures in the Royal Parks[1]	1 November 1979
National Consultative Council for the Building and Civil Engineering Industries	2 April 1980
Location of Offices Bureau	1 May 1980
Committee to Examine Standards of Lawn Tennis in Great Britain	10 June 1980
Corby Development Corporation	30 June 1980
Construction Industry Manpower Board	8 August 1980
Housing Association Registration Advisory Committee	8 August 1980
Stevenage Development Corporation	30 September 1980
Clean Air Council	13 November 1980
Housing Services Advisory Group	27 November 1980
Advisory Panel on Institutional Finance in New Towns	30 November 1980
Centre for Environmental Studies	30 November 1980
Harlow Development Corporation	28 December 1980
Waste Management Advisory Council	January 1981
Noise Advisory Council	12 February 1981
Scientific Authority for Animals	10 March 1981
Runcorn Development Corporation (merged with Warrington)	1 April 1981
National Building Agency	19 February 1982
Advisory Committee on Local Government Audit	31 March 1982
Hydraulics Research Station Advisory Committee	1 April 1982
Bracknell Development Corporation	30 June 1982
Advisory Committee on the Protection of Birds for England and Wales	28 September 1982
Advisory Committee on Rent Rebates and Rent Allowances	31 March 1983
Committee on Recreation Management Training	31 March 1983
Building Research Establishment Advisory Committee	24 August 1983
Water Space Amenity Commission	1 December 1983
National Water Council	1 January 1984
Commission on Energy and the Environment (appointments made jointly with the Secretary of State for Energy)	13 December 1984
Ancient Monuments Board for England[2] / Historic Buildings Council for England[2]	31 March 1984
Committee on the Management of Privately Owned Blocks of Flats	November 1985
Central Lancashire Development Corporation	31 March 1986
Basildon Development Corporation	30 June 1985
Northampton Development Corporation	30 June 1985
Redditch Development Corporation	30 June 1985
Skelmersdale Development Corporation	30 June 1985
PSA Advisory Board	6 February 1986
London Housing Staff Commission	30 June 1986
Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas (CoSIRA)[3]	31 March 1988
Aycliffe and Peterlee Development Corporation	March 1988
Washington Development Corporation	March 1988
Peterborough Development Corporation	September 1988
Tyne and Wear Residuary Body	31 December 1988

[1] Not now classified as non-departmental public bodies.
[2] Wound up upon setting up the Historic Building and Monuments Commission for England under the National Heritage Act 1983.
[3] Merged with Development Commission to form Rural Development Commission.

The costs of the non-departmental public bodies for which my Department was responsible as at 1 July 1988 are shown in the HMSO publication "Public Bodies 1988", which also gives the number of appointments to those bodies.

Since 1 July 1988, four new urban development corporations have been established by my Department. The costs of these bodies and the number of appointments as at 31 March 1989 to them are as follows:

	Grant-in-aid: 1988-89	
	£ million	*Appointments*
Bristol Development Corporation	0·2	10
Central Manchester Development Corporation	2·5	10
Leeds Development Corporation	2·7	10

	£ million	*Appointments*
Sheffield Development Corporation	7·9	10

American Box Turtles

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance his Department issues to importers and pet shop owners about the particular problems of keeping American box turtles in captivity.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None. The Department's responsibilities lie principally with the conservation status of species and the extent to which commercial exploitation might harm the survival of a species in the wild.

Water Quality (Oxford)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many cryptosporidia there have been in an average pint of water supplied by the Thames water authority to the Oxford area in each week since the present water contamination was first detected.

Mr. Howard: Current analytical techniques for monitoring cryptosporidia in water are capable of indicating whether organisms are present in a sample but are not able to provide accurate quantitative results. Techniques for quantification and determination of viability are being developed.

The following results of monitoring have been provided by the Thames water authority. In the three weeks 19 February to 11 March 1989 cryptosporidia were identified in 11 of 38 samples taken at the outlet of treatment works supplying the Oxford area, and in 46 out of 139 samples taken from the distribution system. In the two weeks 12 to 25 March 1989 cryptosporidia were not detected in any of the 25 samples at the treatment works but were detected in six out of 90 samples taken from the distribution system.

Planning Control (Enforcement)

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the report by Mr. Robert Carnwath, QC, on his examination of the scope and effectiveness of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, relating to the enforcement of the planning control.

Mr. Ridley Mr. Robert Carnwath QC has recently submitted his report on the review I announced last July of local authorities' planning enforcement powers. Mr. Carnwath's report is being published today and a copy will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I generally welcome the report's recommendations as a constructive contribution to strengthening the present provisions, in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 for planning enforcement. Before deciding whether to implement the recommendations, I intend to consult widely amongst organisations with a responsibility for, or interest in, planning control. My Department is inviting comments on the report's recommendations by the end of May.

Council Tenant (Landlords)

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will give council tenants the opportunity to choose a new landlord.

Mr. Trippier: The provisions of part IV of the Housing Act 1988, and their associated secondary legislation, come into force today. They will broaden the choices open to secure tenants of local housing authorities and other public sector landlords by giving them an effective right to seek an alternative landlord of their choosing for their existing homes. They will offer tenants better services, whether through a change in landlord or through the effect of competition on existing public sector landlords. They will open up the stocks of rented housing held by local housing authorities and others to diversity, competition and the influence of the best housing management practices. In England, the Housing Corporation, through its network of regional offices, is available to provide advice, information and assistance to tenants wishing to know more about how they can exercise choice under the scheme. Any tenant (or potential landlord) wishing to know more about these opportunities should contact the Housing Corporation. They can do this either by returning one of the coupons currently appearing in the press, or by contacting the corporation direct by telephone at its headquarters or one of its regional offices.

World Heritage List

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any of the sites nominated in 1988 for inclusion in the World Heritage list have been accepted.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At its meeting last December in Brasilia, the World Heritage committee agreed that the following three sites should be inscribed in the list:

Henderson Island, South Pacific ocean
The Tower of London
Canterbury cathedral, St. Augustine's abbey and St. Martin's church

For consideration by the committee in 1989, the sites we have nominated are:

Cambridge colleges and the Backs
Navan Fort, Northern Ireland
Maes Howe and Brogar, Orkney Islands

Electric and Magnetic Radiation

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 14 March to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, in the light of the answer from the Secretary of State for Scotland of 15 March to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish, on what date he expects to receive the report of the National Radiological Protection Board on the effects of very low frequency electric and magnetic radiation.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised that the board expects to publish its guidance on exposures to electromagnetic fields shortly. In addition, the board intends later this year to publish reviews of the existing biological and epidemiological evidence for the effects on health of electromagnetic radiation.

Parish Councils

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his estimates of parish council precepts in 1987-88.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Parish community precepts in England amounted to £61·3 million in 1987-88.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his best estimates of the average level of community charge in 1990-91 in parish councils with *(a)* a population of more than 10,000 and *(b)* a population of less than 10,000.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* I have made no estimates of the average level of community charge in 1990-91 in parish councils.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his best estimates of the average level of precepts in 1988-89 and 1989-90 for parish councils with *(a)* a population of more than 10,000 and *(b)* a population of less than 10,000.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Estimates of the average level of parish/community precepts for 1988-89 are published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy in "Finance and General Statistics". Information for 1989-90 is not yet available. I have made no estimates of the average level of precepts for parish councils broken down by size of population.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Central records are collated annually after the end of the financial year. The latest readily available information therefore covers 1987-88.

The total amount spent was £5·0 milllion and the contracts awarded to management or computing consultants by the Department of the Environment (excluding PSA) in the financial year 1987-88 were as follows:

Firm	*Subject of Assignment*
Admiral Management Services Ltd	DOE's method ofprocessing European Regional Development Fund Infrastructure Grants
Arthur Young	LGFP Office Automation Project quality assurance; OA guidelines.
B.I.S. Applied Systems	Strategic review of data communications and networking options
B.I.S. Applied Systems	Distributed processing
Civil Civil Service Catering Organisatiom	Monitoring of PPC Catering Outlets
Coley Porter Bell	Shop refit design
Coopers and Lybrand Associates Ltd	Local authorities' interests in companies
Coopers and Lybrand Associates Ltd	Planning Appeals Management Information System
Dames and Moore	Hazard Assessment of Ladfill Operations
Davis, Langdon and Everest Consultancy	Improving UK overseas trade data in building materials
D. E. Barnard Systems Ltd	BRE Fire Research Station Library Study
D. E. Barnard Systems Ltd	BESMIS staff management sub-system
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Policy Review of Commission for New Towns
Ecotec Research and Consulting Ltd	Bristol/Manchester UDC Study
Ecotec Research and Consulting Ltd	Study of proposed extension of Black Country Development Corporation into Wolverhampton
Electrowatt Engineering (UK) Services Ltd	Evaluation and radiological assessment of Environmental Monitoring Data
Ernst and Whinney	Review of staffing and procedures of local valuation panel offices
Ernst and Whinney	Review of Housing Corporation monitoring procedures
EXTEL	Hinet Station, teleprinter, VDU's (hardware) maintenance for PSU, South Ruislip
The Grant Leisure Group	Tower of London retailing and visitor management
Healey and Baker	Advice on disposal of New Town assets
ICI plc (Billingham)	Monitoring of environmental radioactivity levels around nuclear installations
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Policy review of the Royal commissions on Ancient and Historical Monuments in England, Scotland and Wales
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Future development of London Zoo and Whipsnade Zoo
Land Use Consultants	Brompton Cemetery

Firm	Subject of Assignment
Lawrence Gould Consultants (and Clyde Surveys)	Land-use change: quality control of statistical system
Ludhouse Computing Ltd.	Sales order processing system, software maintenance; PSU South Ruislip
The Mindworks Partnership	ADP career development in BES
Ove Arup and Partners	Regents Park/Hanover Gate-pedestrian traffic survey
PA Computers and Telecommunications	BRE Publications Study
PA Consulting Group	Consultancy to develop a five-year marketing plan for BRE's private sector activities
PA Personnel Services	Search for UDC Chief Executives—Bristol, Central Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield
PE/Inbucon	Management Review of Council for Environmental Education
PE/Inbucon and Land Use Consultants	Kensington Gardens study
Peter Peregrinus Ltd	Processing research information for ENREP + ERIB databases
PIEDA Planning Economic Development Consultants	Leeds UDC Study
Price Waterhouse Ltd	Costs of Community Charge
Scicon	Corals maintenance and support
Scicon	Corals enhancement
Signal	Support for SOLIS 3
Spicer Consulting Group	Review of finance and accounts system
Roger Tym and Partners	DLG study
Russell Reynolds Associates	British Waterways Board—executive search for new chairman
Russell Reynolds Associates	Wessex Water Authority—executive search for new chairman
Schlackmans	Market research at the royal palaces
Shaftesbury Health and Safety Consultants Ltd	Hyde Park Workshops—health and safety inspection
Stoy Hayward Associates	Grant appraisal ad-hoc accountancy advice
Touche Ross and Co.	Efficiency review of Wessex and South West Water Authorities
Travers Morgan Planning	Woodland Maintenance Costs
Ventures Consultancy	Hampton Court Business Plan
Sir Owen Williams and Partners	Assistance with consideration of reclamation schemes submitted for derelict land grants.

United Nations Environment Programme

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who represented Her Majesty's Government at the latest United Nations environment programme conference in Basle on the international trade and regulation of hazardous and toxic wastes; what proposals were made at the conference by Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement about the outcome of the conference.

Mr. Ridley *[pursuant to his reply, 22 March 1989, c. 651]:* I undertook to make a statement about the outcome of the diplomatic conference in Basle on 20 to 22 March to draw up a convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal. Over 100 countries participated in the conference: 34 signed the convention at the conference but the majority (including the United Kingdom) did not. The Government welcome the thrust of the convention, but the final text did not emerge until the last day of the conference. The convention is still open for signature, and the Government are now studying the final text.

Redbridge (Housing Stock)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of tenants under the London borough of Redbridge proposals for a transfer of housing stock to a housing association need to consent to the transfer for it to go ahead.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* In accordance with schedule 3A to the Housing Act 1985 the Secretary of State would be required to withhold his consent to the transfer if it appeared to him that the

majority of the tenants affected did not wish the transfer to proceed. The Secretary of State may have regard to any information available to him, including any ballot arranged by the council. I understand that the transfer proposals, which the council approved on 23 March include the principle that a 50 per cent. turnout and a simple majority of those voting should be required.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages

42. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many workplaces were visited, and how many of them were found to be illegally underpaying, for the latest available year by the wages inspectorate divisions covering Scotland.

Mr. Nicholls: Information on the number of workplaces in Scotland visited in 1988 for the purpose of checking pay and the number where underpayments were found was included in the reply given on 1 March to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) at columns *201-6*. Information on the number of workplaces visited in Scotland in 1988 for advisory purposes was included in the reply given on 14 March to the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham) at columns *178-79*.

Training Premiums

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of weekly premiums will be paid to *(a)* under 25-year-olds, *(b)* a childless married person and *(c)* other trainees after income support levels are uprated in April 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The weekly rates of training premium at the time of the benefit uprating will be:

(a) £11·95 for single people aged under 25 and in receipt of the standard rate of income support;
(b) £11·25 for couples without children and in receipt of the standard rate of income support;
(c) £10 for all others.

Trade Union Members (Rights)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has yet appointed a commissioner for the rights of trade union members under the terms of the Employment Act 1988; and how many persons he has approached and offered the post to in the last year.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) on 24 November 1988. In accordance with the guidance published by the Cabinet Office and Her Majesty's Treasury about such appointments, several possible candidates were identified, including Mrs. Gill Rowlands.

Skills Training Programme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the annual operating surplus of the Skills Training Agency since it was established.

Mr. Cope: The Skills Training Agency has operated on a trading account basis since 1984-85. No financial results are available prior to that year. Operating surplus/deficits from 1984-85 are as follows:

	£000
1984-85 (Deficit)	15,157
1985-86 (Deficit)	17,539
1986-87 Surplus	220
1987-88 (Deficit)	2,896

Employment Training

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the companies, out of the 100 largest companies, who have declined to co-operate with the employment training scheme; of the remainder, how many places each of them has contracted with the employment training scheme and how many have been so far filled; and what percentage that is in each case.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The Training Agency's records only show which large companies have contracted directly as training managers. It is not, therefore, possible to provide the information in the form requested.

ENERGY

Distribution Boards

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he will next be meeting the chairmen of distribution boards, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the area board chairmen regularly to discuss various matters of mutual interest.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Potato Yields

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to changes in potato yields per acre in the United Kingdom, other European Community countries, Egypt and Cyprus over the past ten years.

Mr. Ryder: Potato yields over the past 10 years are given in the following table:

Tonnes per hectare

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Belgium	35·6	32·4	30·0	31·9	35·8	27·1	36·8	37·4	35·4	36·4
Denmark	27·1	26·6	24·8	29·1	35·5	28·7	32·0	36·2	37·6	32·0
Eire	26·6	26·0	26·0	25·9	26·9	21·7	29·4	24·8	25·0	30·5
France	26·8	26·4	31·9	30·5	31·8	25·4	31·4	33·8	30·8	37·7
Greece	14·1	17·3	17·3	18·0	19·4	18·5	20·0	21·3	21·2	19·8
Italy	16·4	17·9	18·6	19·7	17·9	18·0	17·9	18·2	21·2	19·7

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Luxembourg	32·5	30·0	30·0	34·0	34·0	30·0	34·0	32·8	30·9	32·7
Netherlands	38·6	37·8	36·4	39·0	37·5	33·0	42·0	42·4	40·9	45·0
United Kingdom	34·2	31·9	34·5	32·3	35·8	29·9	37·0	35·8	36·0	37·8
West Germany	29·6	31·6	25·9	30·9	29·6	25·3	33·2	35·9	35·2	33·2
Portugal	9·5	9·5	9·2	7·9	8·7	n/a	n/a	9·1	7·9	8·0
Spain	14·4	15·9	16·2	16·4	15·3	15·2	17·4	17·9	16·8	17·5
Cyprus	21·3	23·3	23·0	22·7	21·5	21·9	22·8	18·2	25·2	21·6
Egypt	13·9	17·1	18·4	17·9	16·9	19·0	17·1	20·6	20·7	21·1

n/a—Not available.
Source: Potato Marketing Board statistics for EC12.
FAO Production Yearbook for Egypt and Cyprus.

Potato Market

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the potato market.

Mr. Ryder: United Kingdom production in the current July/June crop year was 6,899,000 tonnes compared with 6,760,000 tonnes in 1987-88. On the other hand, wastage has been higher as a result of storage problems in a mild winter and stocks are correspondingly low. In Great Britain the most recent weekly average producer price is £61·08 per tonne compared with £73·45 at the corresponding time last year. As a result of these low prices the Potato Marketing Board has intervened in the market and has so far purchased some 97,000 tonnes.

Cereal Sector

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the cereal sector.

Mr. Ryder: The 1988 cereals harvest in the United Kingdom was, at 20·9 million tonnes, the lowest since 1981. Nevertheless, the surplus of wheat and barley in 1988-89, including stocks in intervention stores, is estimated at over 5·5 million tonnes. It is expected that most of this surplus will be exported before the end of the season, substantially reducing intervention stocks. Prices have generally remained firm. In the European Community production was estimated by the Commission in November at 162·5 million tonnes, 1·6 per cent. above the stabiliser of 160 million tonnes. As a result intervention prices will be reduced by 3 per cent. For the 1989-90 marketing year, and the definitive rate of the additional co-responsibility levy for 1988-89 has been set at 1·6 per cent. of the wheat intervention price; additional levy paid at a higher rate is being partially repaid.

Arable Sector

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the arable sector.

Mr. Ryder: In 1988-89, United Kingdom beet sugar production exceeded 1·3 million tonnes, one of the highest levels on record. Returns to United Kingdom sugar beet producers have been broadly in line with those in the previous year, the EC sugar price for 1988-89 having been maintained at the 1987-88 level. For oilseeds and protein crops, returns in 1988-89 have been affected by the operation of the EC stabiliser mechanism for these crops. United Kingdom production of oilseed rape in 1988-89 is estimated at about 1 million tonnes, with prices reduced by 7·65 per cent. below the institutional price level because Community production has exceeded the maximum guaranteed quantity (in effect a small price increase over 1987-88 when prices were reduced by 10 per cent.). United Kingdom production of protein crops is estimated to have reached a record level of about 892,000 tonnes this year. Prices have been reduced by about 10 per cent. in this sector as a result of the stabiliser mechanism.

Sheep Sector

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the sheep sector.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The sheep sector remains in a satisfactory condition. The latest statistics on production, consumption and exports all show increases.

Beef Sector

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the beef sector.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Throughout 1988 prices for finished beef were above those in the previous year. Prices fell at the end of 1988 and are now very similar to those at the same time last year. Prices for other stock, including stores and calves, remain above the levels last year, while the numbers of suckler cows and heifers in calf for beef production continue to grow, reflecting producers' expectations for the beef market.

Dairy Sector

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the dairy sector.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Net income from dairy farming in 1988-89 is estimated to have risen in real terms to its highest level since 1982-83. Improvements in profitability have resulted in recent years from increases in the ex-farm price of milk, reduced usage of feed concentrates and improved returns from calf sales. In addition, the dairy sector as a whole is benefiting from the recovery in markets brought about by the restriction of supply through quotas and the disposal of old intervention stocks of milk products.

Monetary Compensatory Amounts

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made by the European Community towards the abolition of monetary compensatory amounts by 1992.

Mr. MacGregor: Following pressure from the United Kingdom Government, the Council and the Commission have agreed that the completion of the internal market requires the abolition of monetary gaps, and therefore of monetary compensatory amounts.

The devaluations which took place on 1 January this year included an agreed first step in dismantling United Kingdom monetary gaps, and the Commission's price proposals for 1989-90 envisage the next step being taken in the current price negotiations.

The Commission is to report later this year on how the process of dismantlement should be completed.

Ware Potatoes

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total tonnage of imports of ware potatoes in each of the past 10 years, what percentage this tonnage represents as a percentage of *(a)* total potato yield and *(b)* total potato sales in each year; and what was the total purchase by the Potato Marketing Board of surplus potatoes in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Ryder: This information can be derived from the final table in "Potato Statistics in Great Britain 1983-87", published by the Potato Marketing Board. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Eggs

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current position regarding sales of eggs, egg production and numbers of laying hens.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Contact with major packers indicates considerable variations in sales of shell eggs on to the United Kingdom market but it is thought that these are around 20 to 25 per cent. below the levels experienced in November. Throughput at packing stations is now about 11 per cent. down on November. The balance of throughput is going for export and into egg products. At the agricultural census taken on 1 December 1988 the number of egg-laying fowls in the United Kingdom was 36·6 million.

Potato Quota

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what movement into and out of Wales of potato quota has taken place in each of the past five years in both tonnage and percentage terms.

Mr. Ryder: I have asked the Potato Marketing Board to send this information to my hon. Friend.

Early Potatoes

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will take into account in his decisions on the future of the Potato Marketing Board the representations of growers of early potatoes regarding the impact that the removal of the direct intervention buying system will have on the early potato market.

Mr. Ryder: Yes.

Adult Diets (Survey)

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the national nutritional survey of adults diets, conducted during 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The extensive results of this survey are still being analysed. I expect to publish a preliminary report before the end of the year.

Whales

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what discussions he has had with European Community Ministers about preventing the Japanese from killing whales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has had with European Community Ministers about imposing economic sanctions on Japan because of that country's continuation of killing whales.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* We have made clear our serious concerns about the current Japanese feasibility programme of whaling for scientific purposes both directly to the Japanese Government on several occasions and through the International Whaling Commission. The European Community does not have competence on whaling matters as such but those member states with an interest in whaling are members of the IWC and we consult with them in that forum.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Old-Age Pensioners (TV Licence)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now introduce free television licences for all old-age pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 15 December 1988 at column *710*.

Stocken Prison

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to deal with underground electric cables at Stocken prison discovered to be waterlogged following the flooding of ducts; and what has been the effect of these difficulties on electricity supplies to married quarters.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No such difficulty has been brought to our attention and there has been no effect on electricity supplies to married quarters at Stocken prison. The cables are well insulated, but any problems caused by flooding of ducts would be dealt with the prison's works department.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what work is currently in progress at Stocken prison to replace defective heating pipes; what is the age of the pipes in question; and what will be the cost of this work.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A survey of the heating system is under way. To date, defective heating pipes have been

found in one wing and in the central administration block. Twenty metres of pipe, which was five years old, has been replaced at a cost of £600.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cells in Stocken prison are experiencing unpleasant smells linked with the plumbing system; and what action is being taken to rectify these problems.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No complaints have been received about unpleasant smells from the plumbing system.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, following the closure of a cell in A wing at Stocken prison because of building problems, action is being taken to undertake the necessary structural repairs; and what liability exists for paying for this work under the contract conditions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The action to take following the closure of a cell in E wing, not A wing, at Stocken prison because of building problems is under consideration by the Home Office directorate of works. Liability, under the contract conditions, for paying for the work which will be required, has yet to be established.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken since the ministerial letter from the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) dated 5 September 1988 to obtain the advice of an architect regarding the sloping ceilings in the quarters at Stocken prison; and when further action will be taken to implement the advice.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following a vist by a Home Office architect, it has been confirmed that the provision of suspended ceilings would improve the heating of these quarters. A pilot study will be undertaken shortly to see whether this would provide an acceptable solution.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list the action which has been taken since the ministerial letter from the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) of 5 September 1988, to eliminate the nuisance from dust in the married quarters at Stocken prison; and whether the measures have been successful.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Insulation materials have been examined but do not appear to have caused the problem of dust in the married quarters at Stocken prison, which has now been referred to the local environmental health department. Its report is expected shortly.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken, since the ministerial letter of 20 September 1988 by the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), to improve the quality of central heating at the married quarters at Stocken prison; how many claims are outstanding for compensation for excessive heating bills; and when they will be settled.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The question of the quality of heating in the married quarters at Stocken prison has been referred to the building advisory branch of the Property Services Agency, whose report is awaited. One claim has been received for compensation for excessive heating bills, but liability has yet to be established.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken since the visit to Stocken prison on 28 November 1988 by a representative of the building advisory board to deal with dampness in married quarters, following the ministerial letter of 8 December 1988 by the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg); how many claims for compensation for damage to clothing through dampness are outstanding; and when they will be settled.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The question of dampness in married quarters was referred to the building advisory branch of the Property Services Agency, whose report is awaited. Two claims for compensation for damage to clothing are outstanding, but the question of liability has yet to be established.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to improve the street lighting in the married quarters of prison officers at Stocken prison since the ministerial letter of the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) dated 5 September 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A contract has been let to improve the street lighting in the vicinity of the married quarters of prison officers at Stocken prison. Work started on 21 March.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of basic grade prison officers in post at Stocken prison; and what arrangements have been made to increase staffing to cover for officers on long-term sick leave.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 13 March 1989 there were 77 basic grade officers at HMP Stocken. Staffing levels at all prison establishments make allowance for about one fifth of staff to be absent at any one time on sick leave, annual leave or training courses.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether two extra prison officers will be allocated to Stocken prison during April in accordance with the reduction of hours proposals in the fresh start agreement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have recruited sufficient staff nationally for the additional officers required under the fresh start framework agreement to be in post before the reduction of hours on 1 April. The uniformed complement at HMP Stocken has been increase by two with effect from 1 April. The prison already has more staff in post than the new complement figure.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the new wing at Stocken prison will be completed; how many additional inmates will be accommodated in it; and how many additional prison officers will be allocated to the prison to cope with this expansion in inmate numbers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The new house block being built at HMP Stocken will provide 96 single cells and is programmed for completion by the end of 1989. The present intention is to post an additional 19 officers and two night patrols to the prison as a result.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place with

the Anglian water authority to ensure that the local sewage disposal system can cope effectively with the forthcoming expansion of Stocken prison; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No discussions have taken place, but in correspondence in May 1988 Anglian Water confirmed that the additional sewage caused by the expansion to Stocken prison would not exceed the capacity of the pumping station.

Immigration

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Commonwealth immigrants have been allowed to settle in Britain in each of the last five years; what were the comparable figures for the previous five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The number of Commonwealth citizens accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom in each of the years 1979-88 is published in table 22 of "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1987" (Cm. 415) and in table 1 of Home Office statistical bulletin issue 10/89, "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1988", copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals left the United Kingdom under the supervised departure procedure without having been served with a notice of intention to deport in each month of 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Renton: Supervised departure may be authorised, as an alternative to deportation, either under section 3(6) of the Immigration Act 1971 if a court makes a recommendation for deportation, or under section 3(5) following the issue of a notice of intention to deport. The latest available information on the use of supervised departure is contained in table 14 of Home Office statistical bulletin 10/89 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1988", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to amend the immigration rules: and what consultations he has held in that regard.

Mr. Renton: We have it in mind to make some changes to the immigration rules in the next few months. We have not launched formal consultations, but there has been some discussion of possible changes to the rules with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association.

DNA Testing

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all owners and operators of laboratories licensed by him to carry out DNA testing.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Home Office does not license laboratories to carry out DNA testing.

Latchmere House

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with regard to his proposal to transfer detainees from Latchmere house to Haslar, Gosport; and if he will list those organisations which have indicated support for his proposal.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 22 March I met a delegation led by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), which included representatives from Richmond borough council, local residents and the Richmond citizens advice bureau. On 17 March officials met representatives of advisory agencies which specialise in immigration matters. We have so far received representations only from organisations which are opposed to the proposal.

Satellite Television

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to amend section 92 of the Representation of the People Act 1981 to require satellite television organisations broadcasting to the United Kingdom to report on parliamentary by-elections and general elections on the same basis and under the same conditions regarding balance and impartiality as apply to the BBC and ITV companies.

Mr. Renton: Our White Paper on broadcasting proposes that satellite services uplinked from the United Kingdom should be subject to various consumer protection requirements, including that news should be impartial and accurate and that due impartiality should be preserved in dealing with matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy. There is also a provision in the Council of Europe convention on transfrontier television which requires broadcasters to ensure that news fairly presents facts and events and encourages the free formation of opinions. Those countries which adopt the convention will be required to ensure that their broadcasting services, including satellite channels, comply with its provisions.

Entry Applications

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each country the number of *(a)* applications and *(b)* refusals of applications to enter the United Kingdom for (i) settlement and (ii) temporary purposes in (1) 1987 and (2) 1988.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 14 March 1989]:* The information requested is available centrally only for countries in the Indian sub-continent and Hong Kong. This information, and that for other countries on all applications for entry clearance granted and refused, is given in the following tables.

Table 1
Applications for entry clearance to the United Kingdom

Number of persons

Country, and category of application	*1987 Applications newly received*[1]	*1987 Applications granted*[2, 3]	*1987 Applications refused initially*[3]	*1988 Applications newly received*[1]	*1988 Applications granted*[2, 3]	*1988 Applications refused initially*[3]
Bangladesh:						
Settlement[4]	7,600	4,830	1,560	6,650	5,870	1,870
Temporary purposes	10,370	7,730	1,790	11,790	8,830	2,040
India:						
Settlement[4]	5,030	3,810	1,070	4,280	3,810	1,110
Temporary purposes	101,930	93,950	5,140	105,150	93,880	6,760
Pakistan:						
Settlement[4]	7,630	4,450	1,280	6,970	4,730	1,430
Temporary purposes	61,350	49,180	7,610	59,480	47,820	9,560
Hong Kong:						
Settlement	710	590	30	750	640	40
Temporary purposes	51,060	49,930	140	46,760	45,670	100

[1] Including applications subsequently withdrawn.
[2] Granted initially or on appeal.
[3] These applications may have been received in an earlier period.
[4] Including applications for a certificate of entitlement to, or a confirmation of, the right of abode in the United Kingdom.

Table 2
Applications for entry clearance[1] to the United Kingdom
Number of persons[2]

Country	*1987 Applications granted*[3,4]	*1987 Applications refused initially*[4]	*1988 Applications granted*[3,4]	*1988 Applications refused initially*[4]
Afghanistan	210	[5]—	280	—
Algeria	970	10	760	20
Angola	810	[5]—	1,070	—
Argentina	17,130	[5]—	11,600	10
Ascension Island	50	—	n/a	n/a
Australia	12,970	40	18,050	70
Austria	2,630	10	2,240	20
Bahamas	290	—	260	—
Bahrain	4,390	n/a	3,900	40
Bangladesh	12,560	3,350	14,700	3,910
Barbados	2,710	130	1,680	120
Belgium	2,880	60	3,130	50
Belize	130	—	110	—
Bermuda	540	—	500	—
Bolivia	30	[5]—	n/a	n/a
Botswana	640	—	670	[5]—
Brazil	920	[5]—	1,150	[5]—
Brunei	1,220	[5]—	1,240	—
Bulgaria	4,180	10	4,530	10
Burma	640	[5]—	550	10
Cameroon	2,220	n/a	1,810	10
Canada	9,390	10	8,460	10
Chile	210	[5]—	290	—
China	9,590	30	11,660	260
Colombia	740	10	700	60
Congo	100	—	110	—
Costa Rica	120	[5]—	80	n/a
Cote D'Ivoire	450	50	520	10
Cuba	470	[5]—	540	—
Cyprus	7,790	310	7,150	450
Czechoslovakia	11,340	[5]—	13,430	20
Denmark	1,420	30	1,470	30
Ecuador	90	—	100	[5]—
Egypt	25,500	610	23,070	610
Ethiopia	4,070	30	3,610	20
Fiji	490	50	480	30
Finland	470	—	540	—
France	11,580	70	11,740	110
Gabon	390	—	380	[5]—
Gambia	1,120	20	950	20
Germany (FRG)	8,620	90	10,370	150
Germany (GDR)	3,850	—	5,420	[5]—
Ghana	8,750	2,250	9,980	930

Country	1987		1988	
	Applications granted[3,4]	Applications refused initially[4]	Applications granted[3,4]	Applications refused initially[4]
Gibraltar	120	—	160	—
Greece	1,400	60	1,220	70
Guyana	1,470	100	1,660	80
Holy See	20	20	20	—
Honduras	30	[5]—	20	10
Hong Kong	50,510	170	46,310	140
Hungary	16,300	[5]—	17,660	10
Iceland	130	—	130	—
India	97,760	6,210	97,690	7,860
Indonesia	10,370	50	9,470	[5]—
Iraq	3,370	20	4,510	10
Irish Republic	1,700	10	1,700	[5]—
Israel	1,210	[5]—	n/a	n/a
Italy	3,200	30	3,510	40
Jamaica	3,170	710	3,660	400
Japan	3,460	10	4,200	30
Jerusalem	1,820	—	1,370	20
Jordan	11,680	40	10,580	70
Kenya	3,180	80	2,720	110
Korea (South)	360	[5]—	340	60
Kuwait	11,650	50	10,720	50
Lebanon	5,640	—	6,150	[5]—
Lesotho	40	[5]—	40	[5]—
Liberia	2,040	20	1,600	40
Libya	700	[5]—	1,060	[5]—
Luxembourg	260	—	210	—
Madagascar	345	n/a	300	—
Malawi	500	[5]—	460	10
Malaysia	4,660	230	4,460	300
Malta	1,290	30	1,500	20
Mauritius	2,430	240	1,870	n/a
Mexico	540	—	530	—
Mongolia	20	—	30	—
Morocco	650	10	630	20
Mozambique	430	—	420	—
Nepal	1,100	20	1,040	20
Netherlands	4,000	[5]—	2,640	50
New Zealand	4,720	n/a	5,070	—
Nigeria	51,660	4,090	51,880	4,950
Norway	2,230	30	1,980	10
Oman	8,510	—	7,960	40
Pakistan	53,630	8,890	52,550	11,000
Panama	120	[5]—	60	10
Papua New Guinea	320	[5]—	300	[5]—
Peru	250	[5]—	670	[5]—
Philippines	10,210	480	9,950	710
Poland	33,750	330	41,400	680
Portugal	730	30	510	10
Qatar	4,300	30	3,390	50
Romania	4,100	[5]—	3,500	20
Saudi Arabia	40,280	220	n/a	n/a
St. Helena	100	n/a	n/a	n/a
Senegal	870	—	n/a	n/a
Seychelles	130	[5]—	140	10
Sierra Leone	2,520	120	2,330	190
Singapore	3,360	10	3,180	20
Solomon Islands	60	—	60	—
Somalia	540	40	900	50
South Africa	1,640	[5]	n/a	n/a
Soviet Union	14,110	—	15,800	—
Spain	3,060	10	2,870	30
Sri Lanka	7,060	860	7,240	810
Sudan	10,080	10	7,900	40
Swaziland	40	—	30	—
Sweden	3,360	10	3,960	40
Switzerland	4,380	60	n/a	n/a
Syria	70	[5]	210	—
Tanzania	1,680	50	1,610	30
Thailand	16,390	n/a	16,530	n/a
Tonga	20	—	10	—
Trinidad and Tobago	2,490	90	2,230	120
Tunisia	300	[5]	380	—
Turkey	1,590	80	2,400	90
Uganda	580	10	330	10

Country	1987 Applications granted[2,4]	1987 Applications refused initially[4]	1988 Applications granted[2,4]	1988 Applications refused initially[4]
United Arab Emirates	14,950	100	16,820	380
United States	42,090	n/a	37,680	160
Uruguay	130	—	100	—
Vanuatu	50	—	60	—
Venezuela	220	[5]	290	[5]
Vietnam	40	[5]	n/a	n/a
Yemen Arab Republic	n/a	n/a	2,570	[5]
People's Democratic Republic of Yemen	460	n/a	560	n/a
Yugoslavia	410	30	440	40
Zaire	810	—	840	[5]
Zambia	1,850	[5]	2,250	20
Zimbabwe	860	30	1,200	70

n/a Not available.

[1] Including applications for a certificate of entitlement to, or a confirmation of, the right of abode in the United Kingdom (except in Ghana, Hong Kong and Sir Lanka).

[2] Because of rounding, the figures in this table may be slightly different from those implied by Table 1.

[3] Granted initially or on appeal.

[4] These applications may have been received in an earlier period.

[5] Five of fewer.

Prisoners (Escape Attempts)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners escaped from prisons in England and Wales in each of the years since 1979; and if he will list the prisons from which the escapes were made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 20 March 1989]:* The following tables show escapes by prisoners from closed prisons. The information in relation to the years from 1979 to 1985-86 has largely been derived from published annual reports on the work of the prison department, the most convenient source. The information for 1984-85 covers the 15-month period from 1 January 1984—31 March 1985. Thereafter, information relates to the financial year, until the final period which covers from 1 April to 31 December 1988:

Establishment	Number
1979	
Acklington	4
Brixton	1
Camp Hill	4
Channings Wood	7
Dorchester	1
Erlestoke House	2
Featherstone	7
Haverigg	6
Liverpool	2
Northallerton	1
Northeye	19
Norwich	23
Standford Hill	27
The Verne	11
Wymott	2
Total	97
1980	
Acklington	2
Brixton	4
Camp Hill	4
Canterbury	1
Channings Wood	3
Coldingley	1
Erlestoke	4
Exeter	1
Featherstone	2
Haverigg	2
Liverpool	2
Northallerton	1
Northeye	12
Norwich	3
Preston	1
Ranby	2
Standford Hill	20
The Verne	6
Total	71
1981	
Acklington	1
Beckingham	1
Exeter	1
Haverigg	1
Highpoint	4
Lancaster	1
Manchester	1
Northeye	16
Norwich	3
Ranby	1
Rollestone	6
Standford Hill	32
The Verne	10
Wymott	1
Total	79
1982	
Birmingham	5
Brixton	1
Camp Hill	3
Channings Wood	2
Erlestoke	9
Grendon	1
Haverigg	5
Highpoint	3
Leeds	1
Maidstone	2
Manchester	1
Northeye	25
Norwich	10
Nottingham	6
Preston	3
Ranby	1
Standford Hill	23
Swinfen Hall	2
The Verne	11
Wandsworth	2

Establishment	Number
Wymott	1
Total	117
1983	
Acklington	4
Bedford	4
Cardiff	1
Channings Wood	4
Exeter	2
Haverigg	3
Highpoint	4
Manchester	1
Northeye	36
Norwich	4
Ranby	5
Stafford	4
Standford Hill	22
The Verne	2
Wymott	1
Total	97
1984-85	
Birmingham	1
Cardiff	1
Channings Wood	9
Coldingley	1
Haverigg	14
Highpoint	8
Lewes	2
Maidstone	2
Northeye	14
Norwich	4
Oxford	1
Preston	2
Ranby	7
Reading	1
Standford Hill	42
The Verne	5
Total	114
1985-86	
Acklington	5
Blundeston	2
Brixton	5
Channings Wood	6
Featherstone	7
Haverigg	5
Highpoint	10
Lewes	1
Lindholme	5
Maidstone	1
Northeye	23
Norwich	17
Oxford	2
Pentonville	4
Ranby	11
Stocken	1
The Verne	2
Wayland	6
Wormwood Scrubs	1
Wymott	3
Total	117
1986-87	
Acklington	1
Blundeston	2
Cardiff	3
Channings Wood	1
Dartmoor	1
Featherstone	2
Haverigg	5
Highpoint	7
Lindholme	13
Manchester	4
Northeye	10
Norwich	5
Pentonville	1
Ranby	11
Send	2
Stafford	1
The Verne	4
Wayland	6
Total	79
1987-88	
Acklingtom	3
Aldington	7
Bedford	2
Bristol	2
Brixton	2
Camp Hill	1
Canterbury	1
Channings Wood	6
Cookham Wood	2
Dartmoor	1
Exeter	1
Featherstone	3
Gartree	—
Havering	5
Highpoint	7
Holloway	1
Lindholme	26
Manchester	2
Medomsley	1
Northeye	2
Norwich	4
Nottingham	1
Oxford	1
Pentonville	3
Preston	2
Ranby	1
Send	4
Shepton Mallet	3
Stafford	2
The Verne	5
Thorp Arch	1
Wayland	8
Winchester	1
Wymott	2
Total	115
1988 (from 1 April)	
Acklington	3
Ashwell	7
Bedford	3
Brixton	2
Camp Hill	1
Channings Wood	3
Dartmoor	2
Featherstone	9
Havering	3
Highpoint	21
Lindholme	21
Littlehey	3
Manchester	2
Norwich	2
Nottingham	1
Pentonville	7
Ranby	6
Rollestone	1
Stocken	1
Swansea	2
The Verne	6
Thorp Arch	1
Wayland	2
Wymott	3
Total	112

Steel-Cored Bullets

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the article by Thomas Alfred Warlow of his Department's forensic laboratory on the properties of steel-cored bullets published in the British journal of accident surgery.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Mr. Warlow contributed four technical paragraphs on the firearms used in the Hungerford shooting incident to an article in *Injury*, the British journal of accident surgery, describing the management of the 14 patients admitted to Princess Margaret hospital, Swindon after the Hungerford shooting incident.

A copy of the article has been placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* In 1988 my Department spent £406,970 on management consultancy and £70,066 on computer consultancy.

The contracts awarded by my Department in 1988 were as follows:

	Subject of assignment
Recovery Operation Centres Ltd.	To review existing computer data security and prepare a computer contingency plan.
PIEDA	Impact of the rundown of Dounreay Nuclear Establishment and alternative economic opportunities for Caithness (jointly with Highlands and Islands Development Board). Study development proposals for Stirling Old Town put to HBMD by the LIR Leisure Group in conjunction with Stirling District Council.
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells	To produce work programmes for the computer audit of Health Boards. Financial and Management Information System for Scottish Homes.
Coopers and Lybrand Associates	Organisational Structure of Scottish Homes. Review of Information Systems for Scottish Homes. Human Resource Strategy for Scottish Homes. HAG and Loan Accounting Project for Scottish Homes. To assess the future debt servicing capability of the 5 Scottish New Towns industrial and commercial assets, and to advise on the consequential calculation of the amount of National Loans Fund debt to be written off.
Gilpin Black Associates	Management Audit for Scottish Homes.
Edinburgh University Computer Services	Advice on implementation of Scottish Office digital mapping system.
Firn, Crichton Roberts Ltd.	Strathclyde Integrated Development Operation (jointly with Strathclyde Regional Council).
Open College	Consultancy on Open Learning.
University of Warwick	Determination of performance measurements in Further Education.
Dr. S. Clarke	Evaluation and quality of learning and teaching in Further Education.
BIS Applied Systems Ltd.	Consultancy Services for HMI Office Automation Project.
Scottish Examination Board	Systems analysis and computer programming work undertaken in development of procedures for the HMI national task for the use of SCE results.
Dundee College of Technology	Investigation of the administrative arrangements in Jordanhill School.

Coal

18. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to try to ensure a long-term supply contract for Scottish coal between British Coal and the South of Scotland electricity board.

Mr. Lang: Following discussions with my right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, the chairmen of the South of Scotland electricity board and British Coal have now agreed to negotiate on the basis of a five-year contract under which the Scottish electricity industry would purchase 2 million tonnes of coal per annum subject, in respect of the fourth and fifth years, to the conclusion of a satisfactory contract with the electricity supply industry in England and Wales for exports of electricity over the interconnector amounting to 600 MW per annum.

Self-Governing Schools

19. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the Government's proposals for self-governing schools in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend gave earlier to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald).

SCOTLAND

Community Charge

13. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on arrangements for paying the community charge in respect of official ministerial residences in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: The only residence available for Ministers in Scotland is Bute house in Edinburgh. I understand that Lothian region's community charges registration officer has determined that, with the exception of the caretaker's flat in the basement, the property is non-domestic in nature and will therefore be subject to non-domestic rates. Bute house will be considered as a Crown property for this purpose.

20. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the criteria which are being used by community charge registration officers to remove individuals from their register for limited periods.

Mr. Lang: Community charge registration officers will remove the name of an individual from the register in a particular local authority area only if he is no longer liable to pay the community charge there. In addition, a registration officer may exclude an individual's register entry from the publicly available parts of the register if that individual has applied for anonymous registration. In every case, registration officers will base their decisions on all the relevant circumstances.

23. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest estimates for the costs of administration of the poll tax in the coming year.

Mr. Lang: The latest estimate by regional and islands councils of the cost of administering the community charge in 1989-90, including costs of registration and collection, but excluding the cost of the rebate scheme, is £31·73 million.

27. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had since the 1 April with poll tax levying authorities.

Mr. Lang: None.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to report on the levels of payment of the community charge.

Mr. Lang: Although I expect it to be some time before reliable information becomes available, I would expect the level of payment to be broadly the same as it has been for domestic rates.

"Priorities for Patients"

21. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has had from interested bodies in Ayrshire in response to the White Paper "Priorities for Patients".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Some 65 letters have been received from the Ayrshire area offering observations on the White Paper "Working for Patients", most being from general practitioners.

Constitutional Convention

22. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received as a result of the first meeting of the Scottish constitutional convention.

Mr. Rifkind: None.

29. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received an invitation to attend the next meeting of the Scottish constitutional convention; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: I have received no specific invitation to the next meeting of the convention. It would be quite wrong to participate in a convention designed to achieve change which the Government believe would be harmful to Scotland.

Health Care

24. **Mr. Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his future plans for the provision of health care in rural areas in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: The proposals in the White Paper "Working for Patients" are designed to improve health care for patients in rural areas as in other parts of Scotland. They include an undertaking to safeguard the position of doctors in the less-populated areas of Scotland and who offer a good standard of service to their patients.

Highlands (Financial Assistance)

25. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the total additional financial assistance which he will make available to the Highlands in the light of the current year's adverse weather conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland wrote to Highland regional council and Inverness district council on 10 February requesting detailed reports of flood damage and extra costs incurred. He received a reply from Highland region dated 6 March which reports costs without full supporting details, and has just received a report from the district council. Ross and Cromarty and Lochaber district councils have reported additional costs in dealing with storm damage to housing estates. I am assessing this and other information and will make a statement as soon as possible.

COSLA

26. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Ian Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (McAllion).

Waste Dumping

28. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further measures are proposed to deter waste dumping in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) on 22 March at columns *653-54*.

Water (EC Directives)

30. **Mr. Thomas Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Scottish water suppliers will not be able to comply with the deadline set by the EEC to bring water supplies up to EEC directives; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Drinking water supplies which do not comply with the EC standards are the subject of improvement programmes submitted to the European Commission. The Commission does not normally set deadlines and has not expressed dissatisfaction with the programmes submitted, but has asked for those for reducing lead in tap water to be completed by the end of 1989. Only a small number of areas in Lothian and Strathclyde regions will not comply with that date.

Additional capital provisions have already been made and the allocations for water and sewerage have been increased by 14 per cent. for 1989-90. This should enable water authorities to make faster progress on bringing drinking water supplies up to the EC standards.

General Practitioners

31. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many general practitioners in Scotland earn over £55,000 per year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Scottish Development Agency

32. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency; and what matters were discussed.

33. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend met the chairman, Sir David Nickson, on 7 March to discuss the Government's White Paper on Scottish enterprise.

"Working for Patients"

34. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the medical profession on the White Paper "Working for Patients".

35. **Mr. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the Royal College of Nursing about the Government's plans to restructure the National Health Service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We are inviting comments from the medical and nursing professions, as well as from a range of other bodies, on the arrangements for implementation of the White Paper proposals, as set out in detail in six Scottish working papers, published last month.

Law Reform

36. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received regarding his proposals for law reform in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Four responses have been received so far to my right hon. and learned Friend's consultation paper on the legal profession in Scotland. The consultation period continues until 13 June.

Electricity Boards

37. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of the South of Scotland electricity board and the North of Scotland Hydro Electricity Board; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Lang: I met both chairmen on 31 March when they endorsed agreements which will formally replace the joint generating agreement with contractual commitments reflecting the restructuring of the industry for privatisation. A range of relevant matters was discussed.

GPs (Rural Areas)

38. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps are being taken to protect the income of general practitioners in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the White Paper "Working for Patients" we said that we would safeguard the position of doctors in the less-populated areas of Scotland. I wrote to all general practitioners in Scotland on 16 March to make it clear that a Scottish doctor who cannot increase his practice size and who offers a good standard of service to his patients will not suffer a reduction in his income through no fault of his own. I am now receiving the views of GPs which my letter requested and will announce the Government's proposals shortly.

Women's Refuges

39. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from women's aid organisations regarding the levying of the poll tax on residents of women's refuges.

Mr. Lang: I have received a number of representations from Members of Parliament and others on behalf of women's aid groups about the application of the collective community charge to refuges.

Legislative Assembly

40. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received against the setting up of a legislative assembly in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: Since the last general election I have received 32 letters against devolution.

CBI

41. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last discussed unemployment in Scotland with the Confederation of British Industry.

Mr. Rifkind: I have frequent discussions with the Confederation of British Industry on a range of issues affecting the Scottish economy. I am sure that the CBI shares my satisfaction that seasonally adjusted unemployment in Scotland has fallen by 43,400 over the past 12 months and is now at its lowest level since July 1981.

Torness Power Station and Shotts Prison (Documents)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the discovery of documents concerning the design of Torness power station and Shotts prison in a public place close to Torness.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am advised by the South of Scotland electricity board that the fragments of charred papers, apparently from a contractor's bonfire, found near the Torness site, did not disclose any information of a security or other nature which would cause concern to the board.

The Scottish Home and Health Department has investigated the matter in relation to the design of Shotts prison. Expert examination of the documents reveals that what was alleged to have been found were copies of drawings issued to four construction firms invited by a management contractor to tender for a small sub-contract during the construction of Shotts prison in 1986. All the firms concerned have been asked to declare the whereabouts of the original copies sent to them.

The original drawings were not classified and there are no details of security systems shown on the material found. What has been revealed does not appear to constitute a serious breach of security. Nevertheless the Scottish Home and Health Department is reviewing the procedures for handling drawings of prison-related buildings and installations, and will report the result to me.

Tropical Timber

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research is being undertaken into the cultivation of native woods suitable for the substitution of tropical timber and mahogany imports.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Forestry Commission has an active programme of research into the cultivation of native trees which are capable of producing wood that can be used in place of mahogany and other tropical timbers. Topics covered by the research include the selection of provenances, the techniques of establishing, managing and protecting the trees, and the alternative uses of the timber.

European Community (Assistance)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those areas of Scotland he has nominated to the European Community Commission as being eligible for assistance under objective 5b, along with details of geographical boundaries, reasons for inclusions and the date of submission.

Mr. Lang: We already have an assurance from the Commission that the Highlands and Islands (the Highlands and Islands Development Board area) will qualify under objective 5b. We have put forward a case for Dumfries and Galloway (West) (the travel-to-work areas of Stranraer, Wigton and Stewartry) on 19 October 1988. In addition, following discussion with the Commission, cases were submitted on 17 March 1989 for Borders region (travel-to-work areas of Berwickshire, Galashiels, Hawick, Kelso and Jedburgh, and Peebles), Southern Highlands (travel-to-work areas of Aberdeen (less city of Aberdeen), Banff, Blairgowrie and Pitlochry, Brechin and Montrose, Buckie, Crieff, Elgin (part), Forfar, Fraserburgh, Huntly, Keith, Perth, Peterhead and Stirling (part), and eastern Dumfries and Galloway (travel-to-work areas of Annan, Dumfries and Lockerbie). All these areas score well on a number of the criteria for eligibility under objective 5b set out in Council regulation (EEC) No. 4255/88.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what negotiations he has held during 1989 with the Highlands and Islands Development Board in relation to any plan to be submitted to the European Community Commission for structural fund assistance to the Highlands and Islands under objective 5b; and when he anticipates a full plan will be published.

Mr. Lang: Scottish Office officials have discussed with the Highlands and Islands Development Board the draft plan for the Highlands and Islands to be submitted to the Commission under objective 5b. The reformed structural fund regulations provide for consultation on draft plans with partnership authorities (bodies with a direct interest in measures to be funded under the structural funds such as local authorities). They are then submitted to the Commission. In response to the plans, the Commission will draw up a community support framework. It is too early to be certain how long it will be before this is finalised.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet organisations such as the Scottish National Farmers Union, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, enterprise trusts and regional councils on the content of Scottish 5b programmes prior to the submission of plans to the European Community Commission.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans. My noble Friend the Minister of State met yesterday representatives of Highland, Grampian and Strathclyde regional councils and the National Farmers Union of Scotland to hear their proposals for a FEOGA operational programme for the Highland mainland under objective 5b of the European structural funds.

Sand Eels

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the size of the total Shetland sand eel catch, including the proportion of O group and 1 group fish, for each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

	Size of Total Catch (Tonnes)	*Percentage by Weight*	
		O-Group	*1-Group*
1984	32,578	29·7	29·1
1985	17,169	21·4	31·9
1986	11,961	18·5	20·2
1987	7,227	20·2	50·3
1988	4,710	18·0	4·3

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of O group sand eels taken by the Shetland fishery in each of the past 15 years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:—

	Number in millions
1974	929
1975	4,309
1976	4,268
1977	5,970
1978	5,453
1979	1,403
1980	6,432
1981	13,243
1982	16,851
1983	5,604
1984	6,773
1985	2,192
1986	1,785
1987	419
1988	530

Labour Statistics

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest unemployment figures for the Glasgow, Springburn constituency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: On 9 February 1989 there were 6,851 unemployed claimants in the Glasgow, Springburn parliamentary constituency. The constituency has shared in the general improvement in the Scottish unemployment situation with a reduction of over 2,000 in the number of unemployed claimants since the beginning of 1987. By continuing with our successful policies we aim to reduce unemployment even further.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 6 April 1989

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Albert Baker

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the case of Mr. Albert Baker of Her Majesty's prison, Long Lartin.

Mr Douglas Hogg: We are considering a number of petitions from Mr. Baker about his request for transfer to a prison in Northern Ireland and related matters, and we await the outcome of his application for leave to move for judicial review of the Government's decision last year not to transfer him to Northern Ireland. I understand that a hearing has been fixed for 15 May.

Fatal Accidents (Police Vehicles)

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fatal accidents during 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988 involved motor vehicles driven by the police in the course of their duties.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The available information in respect of fatal accidents involving police vehicles in 1987 is contained in the report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for that year, a copy of which is in the Library.

The information requested for earlier years is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1988 are not yet available.

Fire Service

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to change the consultative structure of the fire service as laid down in the Fire Services Act 1947; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to seek changes to the statutory basis of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council constituted under section 29 of the Fire Services Act 1947 or of the arrangements under section 17 of the Act, as amended by the Fire Services Act 1959, relating to disciplinary matters.

Prison Wages

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual wage bill for prisoners at the present time; what the net cost is after administration charges are taken into account; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Expenditure on the earnings of inmates in prison service establishments in England and Wales is forecast to be approximately £6·25 million in the financial year 1988-89. The cost of administering the earnings schemes is not separately identified in the operating costs of establisments. As my right hon. Friend explained in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) on 8 March, at columns *541-42*, the current earnings arrangements are to be reviewed.

Immigration Control (Irish Republic)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Irish Government concerning their immigration controls for visitors from non-European Community countries; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: I regularly attend meetings with the responsible Ministers of all the member states of the European Community, including the Irish Republic, at which matters relating to immigration control are discussed.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the total fees paid out by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and each year to date; and what is the estimate for the current year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* The 1988-89 estimate of payments by the Home Office to management consultants is £1,257,000. Equivalent estimates of payments made in the financial years from 1984-85 were as follows:

	£
1984-85	454,000
1985-86	367,000
1986-87	1,174,000
1987-88	784,000

Information for the years prior to 1984-85 is not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and each year to date; and what is the estimate for 1989-90.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* Since 1979-80, the Home Office has made payments of approximately £72,000 to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation. No expenditure is planned for 1989-90.

Self-mutilation

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of those in custody who have committed acts of self-mutilation, by age and sex, together with the names of the establishments in which they were held and the dates of the incidents, since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 8 March 1989]:* The number of inmates of each prison service establishment who are recorded as having inflicted non-fatal injury on themselves between 1979 and April 1988 is set out in the table. Information on the age of the inmates and the dates of the incidents is not available.

Note on the table

Figures for 1979 to 1983 are recorded by calendar year. Figures for 1985-86 to 1987-88 are recorded by financial year. Figures for 1984-85 include incidents recorded as having occurred between 1 January 1984 and 31 March 1985.

Number of Inmates Recorded as having Inflicted Non-fatal Injury on themselves

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Male Establishments					
Acklington	1	0	0	1	2
Albany	2	1	1	2	0
Aldington	0	3	0	0	1
Appleton Thorn	1	0	—	—	—
Ashford	23	28	23	19	16
Ashwell	2	1	1	0	1
Aylesbury	4	5	6	3	7
Bedford	4	0	0	0	2
Birmingham	32	29	30	44	12
Blantyre House	3	3	5	1	2
Blundeston	5	0	3	0	2
Bristol	14	4	7	8	10
Brixton	8	11	13	17	20
Brockhill	2	1	1	7	3
Buckley Hall	1	4	4	1	2
Camp Hill	2	3	2	—	5
Campsfield House	0	1	1	0	0
Canterbury	19	5	5	2	1
Cardiff	25	20	8	4	29
Castington	0	1	2	5	0
Channings Wood	1	0	1	1	2
Chelmsford	—	0	5	8	8
Coldingley	1	1	1	0	2
Dartmoor	2	1	1	3	4
Deerbolt	7	6	13	1	0
Dorchester	3	6	1	4	4
Dover	14	8	1	1	10
Durham	9	6	8	9	11
Eastwood Park	2	2	1	3	1
Erlestoke	0	0	1	3	0
Everthorpe	4	19	18	14	4
Exeter	7	5	11	11	0
Featherstone	11	6	0	6	2
Feltham	7	1	65	25	27
Finnamore Wood	0	0	0	0	0
Ford	2	0	0	1	0
Foston Hall	0	0	0	0	1
Frankland	—	—	—	0	2
Gartree	4	3	1	0	2
Gaynes Hall	2	0	0	0	1
Glen Parva	5	4	33	5	4
Gloucester	4	6	2	5	1
Grendon	0	6	8	8	17
Gringley	1	1	1	0	0
Guys Marsh	0	0	1	2	0
Haslar	0	1	3	1	0
Hatfield	0	1	0	1	0
Haverigg	5	1	1	5	2
Hewell Grange	2	1	0	1	2
Highpoint	0	2	25	20	2
Hindley	10	11	45	4	2
Hollesley Bay	1	1	0	0	0
Hull	1	0	0	0	0
Huntercombe	0	1	8	2	2
Kingston	1	0	1	1	1
Kirkham	1	2	0	0	0
Kirklevington	1	2	1	1	0
Lancaster	2	4	4	3	3
Latchmere House	3	3	2	1	4
Leeds	10	6	9	11	8
Leicester	—	4	6	2	1
Lewes	15	8	9	27	13
Leyhill	1	0	0	1	0
Lincoln	26	19	20	15	17
Liverpool	31	10	17	12	12
Long Lartin	3	0	5	4	5
Lowdham Grange	3	2	3	1	0
Low Newton	17	12	47	31	14
Maidstone	2	3	2	0	11
Manchester	75	2	107	128	169
Medomsley	0	5	1	1	3
New Hall	1	4	0	2	3
Northallerton	2	3	7	3	0
Northeye	0	2	1	0	1
North Sea Camp	1	2	3	1	2
Norwich	8	14	12	13	5
Nottingham	3	5	3	5	1
Onley	11	4	2	0	1
Oxford	20	12	1	8	11
Parkhurst	3	1	1	4	1
Pentonville	4	9	5	8	9
Portland	15	2	12	9	9
Preston	5	8	5	5	4
Pucklechurch	13	24	12	13	12
Ranby	1	4	—	2	2
Reading	86	1	7	1	1
Risley	7	5	2	10	8
Rochester	2	1	2	1	37
Rudgate	0	0	0	0	0
Send	0	0	0	2	1
Shepton Mallet	3	1	3	5	3
Shrewsbury	6	6	4	—	—
Springhill	0	1	0	0	0
Stafford	18	7	3	2	13
Standford Hill	2	3	0	0	0
Stoke Heath	9	8	11	12	17
Sudbury	1	0	1	1	2
Swansea	3	12	0	2	14
Swinfern Hall	1	4	2	1	1
The Verne	2	0	8	1	1
Thorp Arch	0	4	1	1	3
USK (Prescod)	1	3	4	0	4
Wakefield	3	9	12	12	5
Wandsworth	37	35	34	22	28
Wellingborough	24	16	14	7	11
Werrington	0	2	2	2	2
Wetherby	3	3	0	5	2
Whatton	0	0	1	0	0
Winchester	8	8	7	12	4
Wormwood Scrubs	—	98	26	14	3
Wymott	1	2	2	2	10
Female Establishments					
Askham Grange	171	135	77	130	112
Brixton	0	0	—	—	—
Bullwood Hall	136	163	87	54	38
Cookham Wood	5	6	2	10	10
Drake Hall	2	4	4	0	2
Durham	2	3	2	5	3
East Sutton Park	1	1	0	0	4
Holloway	87	47	58	48	71
Low Newton	0	0	0	0	0
Moor Court	0	0	0	—	—
Pucklechurch	18	17	9	10	9
Risley	10	8	11	—	1
Styal	33	136	95	52	42

Number of inmates recorded as having inflicted non-fatal injury on themselves

	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Male Establishments				
Acklington	4	0	1	1
Albany	1	2	0	0
Aldington	3	2	0	0
Ashford	34	26	44	15
Ashwell	1	0	0	1
Aylesbury	3	3	2	3
Bedford	21	13	14	14

	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Birmingham	45	6	30	15
Blantyre House	4	0	0	0
Blundeston	1	4	0	1
Bristol	3	4	4	2
Brixton	32	13	19	8
Brockhill	12	9	8	5
Buckley Hall	1	4	2	1
Camp Hill	9	14	8	6
Campsfield House	0	5	2	2
Canterbury	1	0	0	13
Cardiff	51	62	50	31
Castington	4	4	4	2
Chilwings Wood	1	4	1	1
Chelmsford	17	19	9	69
Coldingley	3	3	5	2
Dartmoor	0	27	4	8
Deerbolt	16	9	36	6
Dorchester	3	3	2	0
Dover	3	0	2	2
Durham	22	13	11	11
Eastwood Park	2	4	2	0
Erlestoke	4	7	0	0
Everthorpe	5	2	2	12
Exeter	5	0	2	29
Featherstone	0	0	0	0
Feltham	12	15	19	23
Finnamore Wood	0	0	0	0
Ford	1	3	0	0
Foston Hall	3	1	1	0
Frankland	5	10	3	4
Full Sutton	—	—	—	0
Gartree	1	1	2	6
Glen Parva	51	50	65	68
Gloucester	6	3	5	1
Grendon	16	20	13	14
Gringley	0	0	2	0
Guys Marsh	4	2	2	5
Haslar	0	1	0	0
Hatfield	0	1	0	0
Haverigg	2	5	3	3
Hewell Grange	1	10	0	0
Highpoint	1	3	4	6
Hindley	14	12	40	20
Hollesley Bay	1	2	8	4
Hull	3	6	34	39
Huntercombe	6	1	0	6
Kingston	2	3	1	1
Kirkham	0	2	0	0
Kirklevington	0	2	0	0
Lancaster	3	2	2	3
Latchmere House	2	0	17	0
Leeds	13	13	12	5
Leicester	2	3	2	5
Lewes	18	17	13	9
Leyhill	0	1	1	0
Lincoln	23	26	25	44
Lindholme	—	2	5	4
Littlehey	—	—	—	13
Liverpool	6	12	35	50
Long Lartin	2	2	2	3
Lowdham Grange	0	0	1	0
Low Newton	21	20	14	16
Maidstone	13	2	0	0
Manchester	89	83	101	150
Medomsley	0	2	3	—
Morton Hall	—	0	0	0
New Hall	6	3	4	—
Northallerton	6	10	9	5
Northeye	4	2	0	1
North Sea Camp	0	2	2	0
Norwich	12	10	5	38
Nottingham	5	5	5	1
Onley	3	19	18	18
Oxford	7	11	15	11
Parkhurst	0	0	1	6
Pentonville	25	13	5	9
Portland	15	9	10	5
Preston	3	7	4	6
Pucklechurch	22	17	11	15
Ranby	6	4	4	1
Reading	1	1	2	2
Risley	4	2	5	2
Rochester	41	35	26	54
Rudgate	0	0	1	1
Send	3	3	2	1
Shepton Mallet	8	2	1	1
Shrewsbury	2	1	5	8
Springhill	0	0	0	0
Stafford	11	6	6	5
Standford Hill	1	0	0	0
Stocken	—	1	7	0
Stoke Heath	17	24	18	13
Sudbury	0	0	0	1
Swansea	18	13	18	12
Swinfern Hall	1	0	3	5
The Verne	0	0	1	0
Thorn Cross	—	0	0	3
Thorp Arch	0	17	1	0
USK (Prescoed)	1	4	3	7
Wakefield	5	6	4	3
Wandsworth	18	16	9	11
Wayland	—	6	5	1
Wellingborough	14	6	17	9
Werrington	1	0	2	2
Wetherby	3	2	2	4
Whatton	0	0	0	0
Winchester	8	7	4	7
Wormwood Scrubs	4	18	7	30
Wymott	8	3	2	5
Female Establishments				
Askham Grange	78	64	72	65
Bullwood Hall	63	34	28	35
Cookham Wood	21	5	11	5
Drake Hall	5	4	1	0
Durham	6	9	2	4
East Sutton Park	2	0	0	0
Holloway	82	78	63	77
Low Newton	0	0	3	1
New Hall	—	—	—	19
Pucklechurch	19	24	18	22
Risley	28	5	9	1
Styal	157	56	32	18

Thames Tidal Flood Warning System

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place between his Department and the London residuary body in respect of the Thames tidal flood warning system; and what will be the arrangements after 30 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him earlier today.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Economic Growth

13. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next intends to forecast the rate of economic growth in 1989-90.

80. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next intends to forecast the rate of economic growth in 1989-90.

106. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the expected rate of growth this year of the United Kingdom economy.

120. **Mr. Goodlad:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next intends to forecast the rate of economic growth in 1989-90.

Mr. Major: In my right hon. Friend's Autumn Statement.

96. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual rate of growth over the last seven years for which figures are available.

105. **Mr. Aspinwall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual rate of growth over the last seven years for which figures are available.

112. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual rate of growth over the last seven years for which figures are available.

140. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the average annual rate of growth over the last seven years for which figures are available.

Mr. Major: In the seven years to 1988, the average annual rate of growth of GDP was 3·3 per cent. This was the steadiest seven-year period of growth averaging above 3 per cent. since the war.

Indirect Taxes

16. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total amount of indirect taxes paid by a family on three quarters of average earnings.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that in 1988-89, a married man on three quarters of average male earnings with two children will pay £25 per week in indirect taxes (excluding rates).

Medical Insurance

17. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his proposal for private medical insurance tax relief will cost in a full year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: About £40 million in 1990-91.

49. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his proposal for private medical insurance tax relief will cost in a full year.

97. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his proposal for private medical insurance tax relief will cost in a full year.

130. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his proposal for private medical insurance tax relief will cost in a full year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: About £40 million in 1990-91. In subsequent years the cost is likely to rise as more over-60s are encouraged by the relief to take out medical insurance.

Asset Sales

18. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the Budget surplus is attributable to asset sales.

Mr. Lawson: The PSDR in 1988-89 is expected to be £14 billion, or 3 per cent. of GDP. Even excluding privatisation proceeds, the PSDR would have been £7 billion, equivalent to 1½ per cent. of GDP, only the second net repayment on this basis in any year since the beginning of the 1950s—the earliest date for which comparable figures are available.

Inflation

19. **Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current inflation rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* other members of the Group of Seven.

40. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the current inflation rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* other members of the Group of Seven.

Mr. Lilley: The current 12-month inflation rates for the United Kingdom and the other members of the Group of Seven are given in the weekly OECD publication, "Current Economic Indicators", a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

25. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the inflation rate to fall below 5 per cent.

41. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the inflation rate to fall below 5 per cent.

113. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the inflation rate to fall below 5 per cent.

170. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the inflation rate to fall below 5 per cent.

Mr. Lilley: In the Financial Statement and Budget Report the annual rate of RPI inflation is forecast to moderate to 5½ per cent. by the final quarter of this year, and to fall further to 4½ per cent. by the second quarter of 1990.

33. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what the impact of his Budget measures will be on the retail prices index.

53. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what the impact of his Budget measures on the retail prices index will be.

63. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the estimated effect of the Budget proposals on inflation.

94. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what will be the impact of his Budget measures on the retail prices index.

153. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate what the impact of his Budget measures on the retail prices index will be.

Mr. Lilley: Prudent monetary and fiscal policies will continue to bear down on inflation. The direct impact of the Budget proposals on the retail prices index will be negligible.

43. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of the European Economic Community have inflation rates lower than that in the United Kingdom.

117. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members of the European Economic Community have inflation rates lower than that in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lilley: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Hemsworth, South (Mr. Buckley).

65. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now revise the rate of inflation predicted in his Budget statement.

76. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next intends to revise his Budget forecast for inflation for 1989-90.

85. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now revise the rate of inflation predicted in his Budget statement.

154. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now revise the rate of inflation predicted in his Budget statement.

159. **Mr. Adams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will now revise the rate of inflation predicted in his Budget statement.

Mr. Lilley: It is much too soon to revise the forecast in the FSBR. My right hon. Friend will next update his published inflation forecast in the Autumn Statement.

99. **Mr. Bell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in the light of his Budget statement of future forecasts for inflation.

Mr. Lilley: None.

103. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects to achieve his target for inflation of zero per cent.

116. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to achieve his target for inflation of zero per cent.

142. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects to achieve his target for inflation of zero per cent.

179. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he now expects to achieve his target for inflation of zero per cent.

Mr. Lilley: The medium-term financial strategy set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report on 14 March assumed the annual rate of inflation in the GDP deflator would be down to 2½ per cent. by 1992-93. The ultimate objective remains zero inflation.

131. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received recent representations from the Confederation of British Industry about inflation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: No. But my right hon. Friend receives copies of CBI publications. In his Budget speech the Chancellor noted that inflation was expected to fall to 5½ per cent. by the end of this year, and to 4½ per cent. in the second quarter of 1990.

135. **Mr. Richard Shepherd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the rates of inflation for the United Kingdom from 1986 to 1989 and on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average for 1986 to 1989.

Mr. Lilley: The OECD "Economic Outlook" published in December 1988 gives the average rates of inflation in the OECD countries for the years in question with estimates and forecasts for 1988 and 1989. The Financial Statement and Budget Report contains a forecast for the United Kingdom inflation rate in the year to 1989 fourth quarter. United Kingdom inflation rates for earlier years can be calculated from figures contained in the monthly Department of Employment publication, *Employment Gazette*.

Budget (Representations)

20. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from industrial organisations in connection with his recent Budget statement.

Mr. Major: The proposals in my right hon. Friend's Budget have been widely welcomed.

24. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

35. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

145. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

168. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

174. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on his Budget.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The proposals in my right hon. Friend's Budget have been widely welcomed.

Low Pay

21. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to further reduce the tax burden on the low paid.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend outlined in his Budget statement on 14 March his proposals to increase the main allowances in line with statutory provisions and to reform the system of employees' national insurance contributions. When it is prudent and sensible to do so we intend to reduce the basic rate of income tax further to a target of 20p in the pound.

127. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the effect of his Budget proposals upon those on lower incomes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Those on lower incomes will benefit from the reduction and reform of national

insurance contributions, the abolition of the pensioners' earnings rule and the extension of the over-80s age allowance to those aged 75 and over.

Balance of Payments

22. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries in the European Economic Community have a larger balance of payments deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

88. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries in the EEC have a larger balance of payments deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

95. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries in the EEC have a larger balance of payments deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Major: On the basis of published figures, none.

23. **Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate when the balance of payments will return to surplus.

32. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate when the balance of payments will return to surplus.

77. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate when the balance of payments will return to surplus.

175. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate when the balance of payments will return to surplus.

Mr. Major: The Financial Statement and Budget Report for 1989-90 published on 14 March provided forecasts of the balance of payments for 1989 and the first half of 1990. The balance of payments on current account is expected to remain in deficit over this period. Forecasts for later years are not published.

52. **Ms. Harman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current balance of payments deficit.

83. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current balance of payments deficit.

111. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current balance of payments deficit.

114. **Ms. Gordon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current balance of payments deficit.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Members to the recently published Financial Statement and Budget Report.

37. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the balance of payments deficit will begin to fall as a percentage of gross domestic product.

90. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the balance of payments deficit will begin to fall as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Major: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett).

Share Ownership

26. **Mr. Knowles:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the extent of share ownership in Britain.

172. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the extent of share ownership in Britain.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The joint Treasury and stock exchange survey carried out in January and February 1989 estimated that approximately 9 million people own shares, 20 per cent. of the adult population. This represents a threefold increase since 1979.

Savings

27. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of savings in the British economy.

125. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of savings in the British economy.

167. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of savings in the British economy.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of savings in the British economy.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about savings.

Earnings

28. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in the real take-home pay of a married man, with two children, on average male earnings from 1978-79 to 1988-89.

108. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in the real take-home pay of a married man, with two children, on average male earnings from 1978-79 to 1988-89.

171. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in the real take-home pay of a married man with two children on average male earnings from 1978-79 to 1988-89.

173. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in the real take-home pay of a married man with two children on average male earnings from 1978-79 to 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Real take-home pay for a married man with two children on average male earnings is 29 per cent. higher in 1988-89 than in 1978-79.

115. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in the real take-home pay of a married man, with two children, on half average male earnings from 1978-79 to 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on 22 March at column *585*.

Government Expenditure

29. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the fall in general Government expenditure, excluding privatisation proceeds, as a percentage of gross domestic product since 1982-83.

139. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the fall in general Government expenditure, excluding privatisation proceeds, as a percentage of gross domestic product since 1982-83.

149. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the fall in general Government expenditure, excluding privatisation proceeds, as a percentage of gross domestic product since 1982-83.

Mr. Major: The Financial Statement and Budget Report gave a figure of 39½ per cent. for the ratio of general Government expenditure (excluding privatisation proceeds) to gross domestic product in 1988-89. The corresponding figure for 1982-83 was 46¾ per cent.

Independent Taxation

30. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the introduction of independent taxation for husband and wife in April 1990.

123. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the introduction of independent taxation for husband and wife in April 1990.

152. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the introduction of independent taxation for a husband and wife in April 1990.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the introduction of independent taxation for husband and wife in April 1990.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend has received a number of letters on this subject.

Productivity

31. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in British manufacturing productivity since 1979.

81. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in British manufacturing productivity since 1979.

93. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in British manufacturing productivity since 1979.

107. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the percentage increase in British manufacturing productivity since 1979.

Mr. Major: Output per head in United Kingdom manufacturing industry in the three months up to January 1989 was 48·8 per cent. higher than its average level in 1979, an average annual growth rate of 4·3 per cent.

72. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the trends in productivity in British industry.

Mr. Major: Output per head in the manufacturing sector in the three months up to January 1989 was 55 per cent. higher than its average level in 1980. This is equivalent to an annual average growth rate of 5·3 per cent. significantly higher than the 1·6 per cent. growth achieved in the 1970s and 3 per cent. a year in the 1960s. Since 1980, United Kingdom manufacturing productivity growth has been higher than in any other major industrialised country.

Imports

34. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the value of imports in the current financial year.

60. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the value of imports in the current financial year.

164. **Mr. Lambie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the value of imports in the current financial year.

Mr. Major: Estimates for the value of imports for the whole of the financial year 1988-89 have yet to be published. The Financial Statement and Budget Report does not provide a forecast of the value of imports.

Income Tax

36. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of people who will pay income tax in 1989-90.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that about 21·3 million single people and married couples (24.9 million individuals) will be liable to income tax in 1989-90. These estimates are based on a projection of the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Manufactured Goods

38. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what is his latest estimate of the balance of trade payments with respect to manufactured goods for the current financial year.

44. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the balance of trade payments with respect to manufactured goods for the current financial year.

55. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the balance of trade payments with respect to manufactured goods for the current financial year.

92. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the balance of trade payments with respect to manufactured goods for the current financial year.

Mr. Major: Estimates for the balance of trade in manufactured goods for the whole of the financial year 1988-89 have yet to be published. The Financial Statement and Budget Report provides a forecast only for calendar year 1989.

Interest Rates

39. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* United States of America.

58. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Japan.

91. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what are the interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Japan.

118. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Japan.

166. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* the United States of America.

Mr. Lilley: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner).

45. **Mr. Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates.

100. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates.

124. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates.

126. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: Bank base rates are 13 per cent.

67. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Germany.

102. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the interest rates in *(a)* Britain and *(b)* Germany.

Mr. Lilley: Three month interbank rates on 4 April were 13 per cent. in the United Kingdom and 6·5 per cent. in Germany.

89. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of interest rates since the Budget.

Mr. Lilley: Bank base rates have remained at 13 per cent. since the Budget.

New Businesses

42. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the weekly rate of net business start-ups in 1988.

68. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the weekly rate of net business start-ups in 1988.

160. **Dame Pegger Fenner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the weekly rate of net business start-ups in 1988.

Mr. Major: In 1987, the latest year for which figures have been published by the Department of Employment, the net increase in the number of businesses registered for VAT was 45,000, an average of approaching 900 a week. Indications are that the rate of increase in 1988 is even faster. The number of VAT registrations and de-registrations processed by Customs and Excise during 1988 indicate a net increase of over 1,200 a week. Department of Employment figures for 1988 will be available in the summer.

Taxation

46. **Mr. Leighton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their income people on three quarters of average earnings were paying in total taxation *(a)* in 1978-79 and *(b)* in 1988-89.

56. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their income people on three quarters of average earnings were paying in total taxation *(a)* in 1978-79 and *(b)* in 1988-89.

109. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their income people on three quarters of average earnings were paying in total taxation *(a)* in 1978-79 and *(b)* in 1988-89.

146. **Mr. Leadbitter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their income people on three quarters of average earnings were paying in total taxation in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A single person on three quarters of average earnings is estimated to have paid 40·4 per cent. of their income in income tax, national insurance contributions and indirect taxes (excluding local authority rates) in 1978-79 and 40 per cent. in 1988-89. The figure is forecast to fall to 39·2 per cent. in 1989-90.

47. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their income the average earner was paying in direct and indirect taxes in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1988-89.

57. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of their income the average earner was paying in direct and indirect taxes in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1988-89.

66. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of his income was the average earner paying in direct and indirect taxes in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1988-89.

Mr. Norman Lamont: A single person on average male earnings is estimated to have paid 42·3 per cent. of their income in income tax, national insurance contributions and indirect taxes (excluding local authority rates) in 1978-79 and 41·3 per cent. in 1988-89. The figure is forecast to fall to 40·6 per cent. in 1989-90.

84. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the taxes which have been abolished since 1979.

134. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchquer if he will list all the taxes which have been abolished since 1979.

136. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the taxes which have been abolished since 1979.

155. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the taxes which have been abolished since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The main taxes abolished since 1979 are:

investment income surcharge in 1984;
national insurance surcharge in 1984;
development land tax in 1985;
capital transfer tax on lifetime gifts in 1986;
capital duty and unit trust instrument duty in 1988.

In addition, a number of minor duties have been abolished.

132. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much the top 1 per cent. of tax units paid in tax in 1988-89 and how much would this group have paid had the 1987-88 tax levels remained unchanged except for indexing.

138. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much the top 1 per cent. of tax units paid in tax in 1988-89; and how much this group would have paid had the 1987-88 tax levels remained unchanged except for indexing.

157. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much the top 1 per cent. of tax units paid in tax in 1988-89, and how much would this group have paid had the 1987-88 tax levels remained unchanged except for indexing.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate how much the top 1 per cent. of tax units paid in tax in 1988-89 and how much would this group have paid had the 1987-88 tax levels remained unchanged except for indexing.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In 1988-89 the income tax liability of the top 1 per cent. of tax units liable to tax is estimated to be £6 billion. If the 1988 Budget had merely indexed tax thresholds and allowances and assuming the same levels of income as above, their liability would have been £8·1 billion.

These estimates are based on a projection of the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Gross Domestic Product

48. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the increase in the output measure of gross domestic product in the year to the fourth quarter of 1988.

178. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the increase in the output measure of gross domestic product in the year to the fourth quarter of 1988.

Mr. Major: The output measure of gross domestic product is estimated to have increased by 3 per cent. between the fourth quarter of 1987 and the fourth quarter of 1988.

Tax Relief

50. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of tax relief in relation to *(a)* enterprise zones, *(b)* business expansion schemes and *(c)* personal equity plans.

74. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of tax relief in relation to *(a)* enterprise zones, *(b)* business expansion schemes and *(c)* personal equity plans.

144. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of tax relief in relation to *(a)* enterprise zones, *(b)* business expansion schemes and *(c)* personal equity plans.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan).

Mortgage Payments

51. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the average monthly mortgage repayment increased between March 1988 and March 1989.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is not possible to make a direct comparison because of the variety of mortgages, some of which involve payments of interest and endowment premiums and others include repayments of capital as well as interest. But the additional interest payable on the average sized mortgage of £22,000 is about £50 per month. The increase is less in those cases where the repayment period has been extended or part of the interest has been deferred.

Profit-related Pay

54. **Mr. Allan Roberts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the work force is currently participating in profit-related pay schemes as defined by the Inland Revenue.

73. **Mr. Radice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the work force is currently participating in profit-related pay schemes as defined by the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid).

Public Sector Debt

59. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of the public sector debt repayment.

87. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of the public sector debt repayment.

163. **Mr. David Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the level of the public sector debt repayment.

Mr. Lilley: The Treasury has received a number of representations welcoming the improvement in public sector finances, which is expected to result in 1988-89 in the largest budget surplus since figures has been kept on a comparable basis.

Low-cost Housing

61. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he has given to landowners regarding capital

gains tax liability in respect of land made available at below market prices for the purpose of enabling the provision of low-cost housing.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend's Budget Statement.

Charitable Donations

62. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in charitable giving since 1979.

133. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in charitable giving since 1979.

177. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in charitable giving since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary on 16 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, columns *300-1*, which included a number of changes introduced by the Government to encourage charitable giving.

Some measure of the success of these changes is shown in the increases in gifts to charity. For covenanted giving, the estimated growth in real terms between 1978-79 and 1987-88 is 140 per cent. The real increase in bequests to charities over the same period is 150 per cent.

Retail Prices Index

64. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact of the public sector price rises announced for April on the retail prices index.

119. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact of the public sector price rises announced for April on the retail prices index.

122. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact of the public sector price rises announced for April on the retail prices index.

128. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the impact of the public sector price rises announced for April on the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley: The electricity board and the water authorities have already announced price increases to take effect this month. It is estimated that these changes, once they have fully worked through to consumers' bills, will raise the RPI by less than ¼ per cent.

79. **Mr. French:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the average annual increase in the retail prices index for the period 1974 to 1979 and for the most recent five-year period for which figures are available.

Mr. Lilley: The retail price index rose on average 15·5 per cent. a year in the five years to 1979, over three times higher than its average annual growth of 5·1 per cent. over the five years to February 1989.

Manufacturing Investment

69. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest information on the investment intentions of British manufacturing industry.

150. **Mr. Soames:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest information on the investment intentions of British manufacturing industry.

Mr. Major: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd).

Sports Clubs (VAT)

70. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has of the number of amateur sports clubs which pay value added tax on collections to provide refreshments; whether he has any proposals to abolish this requirement; and what information he has as to whether this requirement obtains in other EEC countries.

Mr. Lilley: The VAT treatment of sports clubs' collections is determined by European Community VAT law, which defines what constitutes a taxable supply. If no conditions are attached to the collections, they are outside the scope of VAT. However, where they amount to a general charge for facilities, such as the provision of refreshments, VAT does apply. Whether or not these provisions are likely to change depends on developments in the Council, which is considering possible amendments to the law in this area. I regret that detailed information about the treatment of sports clubs' collections in other member states is not available.

Personal Equity Plans

71. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was his original forecast for the take-up of PEP schemes; and what is his latest estimate of the number of existing schemes.

151. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was his original forecast for the take-up of personal equity plan schemes; and what is his latest estimate of the number of existing schemes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: When personal equity plans were announced in the 1986 Budget it was recognised that take-up would be heavily influenced by external factors. The estimated cost of the scheme assumed that take-up could reach 500,000 in the first year. Latest information suggests that more than 400,000 plans have been taken out to date.

104. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of those investing with personal equity plan schemes are higher rate taxpayers.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that the information is not available.

Pensioners (Income)

72. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the post-tax income of pensioners since 1979.

148. **Mr. Nelson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the post-tax income of pensioners since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet).

Group of Seven

75. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met his counterparts in the Group of Seven; and what was discussed.

82. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met his counterparts in the Group of Seven; and what was discussed.

98. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met his counterparts in the Group of Seven; and what was discussed.

169. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met his counterparts in the Group of Seven; and what was discussed.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer met his counterparts on 2 April at the meeting of the Group of Seven Finance Ministers in Washington. A statement was released.

A wide range of topics were discussed, including progress and prospects for the world economy. Finance Ministers' commitment to close co-operation on exchange markets was reiterated. They committed themselves to resisting protectionist pressures wherever they arise. The recent proposals by several countries for further development of the debt strategy were also discussed, including ways by which the strategy could be strengthened by placing greater emphasis on voluntary debt and debt service reduction in agreement with commercial banks as a complement to new lending.

Hospital Radio Equipment

78. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received since his Budget statement of zero-rating hospital radio equipment.

Mr. Lilley: One.

Exchange Rates

86. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on sterling exchange rate movements since the Budget.

Mr. Lilley: Following the Budget statement, sterling rose against the dollar and the Deutschmark.

Privatisation

101. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the major businesses which have been privatised since 1979.

162. **Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the major businesses which have been privatised since 1979.

165. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the major businesses which have been privatised since 1979.

180. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the major businesses which have been privatised since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Nineteen major businesses have been privatised since 1979. These are:

British Aerospace (1981 and 1985)
Cable and Wireless (1981, 1983 and 1985)
National Freight Consortium (1982)
Britoil (1982 and 1985)
Amersham International (1982)
Associated British Ports (1983 and 1984)
Enterprise Oil (1984)
Sealink (1984)
Jaguar (1984)
British Telecom (1984)
British Shipbuilders warship yards (1984-85)
British Gas (1986)
National Bus Company (1986-88)
British Airways (1987)
Royal Ordnance (1987)
Rolls-Royce (1987)
BAA (1987)
Rover Group (1988)
British Steel (1988)

Inland Revenue Staff

110. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the review into the viability of relocating Inland Revenue staff out of London to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General announced on 9 February that most large Departments had reviews of location in hand. The Inland Revenue's review is well advanced, but its report has not yet been published, nor will decisions be taken on its recommendations, until full consultations have taken place with the staff and the departmental trade union side. As yet, no timetable has been set for such consultation, so I cannot tell my hon. Friend when an announcement will be made.

IMF (Loan Conditions)

121. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to prevent the International Monetary Fund imposing conditions on loans to indebted countries which may harm the poorest people in those countries.

Mr. Lilley: The purpose of programmes supported by the International Monetary Fund is to help stabilise economies and so create the right environment for sustained growth, thus reducing poverty. Some of the poorest groups may benefit immediately—for instance farmers, through the introduction of agricultural reforms giving them better prices for their crops. The fund is aware that there may be short-run adverse effects on other poor groups, and is ready to help design programmes in a way which minimises these, with help from the World Bank. But it cannot impose any given income distribution—this has to be for the countries concerned to decide.

General Aviation and Manufacturers Association

129. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives of the General Aviation and Manufacturers Association; and what was discussed.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has not met representatives of GAMTA. However, I met a deputation led by my hon. Friend which included representatives of GAMTA on 20 December 1988 when the duty charge on aviation gasoline (AVGAS) was discussed.

European Monetary Systems

137. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is now in a position to decide the right moment for the United Kingdom to effect full membership of the European monetary system.

Mr. Lilley: No.

Industrial Investment

141. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the level of industrial investment in the last year; and what change he expects in investment in the current year.

Mr. Major: Total business investment in 1988 was £49·8 billion at 1985 prices, its highest level ever, as a percentage of GDP. It was forecast in the Financial Statement and Budget Report to increase yet further, by 8 per cent. in 1989.

Court of Auditors Report

143. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise at the next meeting of the Council of Finance Ministers the issues set out in the Court of Auditors report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr Rowe) on 15 March at column *245*.

Disposable Income

147. **Mr. Tredinnick** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the growth of real personal disposable income between the third quarter of 1987 and the third quarter of 1988.

156. **Mr. Patrick McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the growth of real personal disposable income between the third quarter of 1987 and the third quarter of 1988.

161. **Mr. Neil Hamilton** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the growth of real personal disposable income between the third quarter of 1987 and the third quarter of 1988.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Real personal disposable income rose by 5 per cent. between the third quarter of 1987 and the third quarter of 1988. Latest estimates show that in 1988 as a whole, real personal disposable income also rose 5 per cent.

Company Returns

158. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage increase in 1987 in the net real rate of return for non-North sea industrial and commercial companies.

176. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage increase in 1987 in the net real rate of return for non-North sea industrial and commercial companies.

Mr. Major: The net real rate of return for non-North sea industrial and commercial companies rose a further 15 per cent. in 1987 to reach 10·2 per cent., its highest level for 18 years.

Pensioners (Income)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the change in the post-tax income of pensioners since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet).

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures he has for the growth in employee ownership among firms in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Nearly 1,600 all-employee share schemes have been approved, against 30 in 1979. More than 1¾ million employees have been given shares or options over shares under these schemes, with an initial market value in excess of £4 billion.

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Excise Duty

185. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the value of vehicle excise duty in the current financial year will be.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Revenue (in cash terms) from vehicle excise duty (VED) is estimated at £2,775 million for financial year 1988-89 and £2,889 million for 1989-90. Rates of VED for all vehicles are contained in leaflet VI49, "Rates of Vehicle Excise Duty", which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Railway Accidents

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the total number of fatal and non-fatal casualties for all railway accidents involving only railway employees in each year since 1959.

Mr. Portillo: This information is not available in the form requested. Details of the total number of railway employees killed or injured in accidents each year are given in the chief inspecting officer of railways' annual report, copies of which have been placed in the House of Commons Library. It is estimated from available data that the number of casualties sustained in accidents involving only railway employees is not significantly less than the overall total of staff casualties in all accidents.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the date and place and the number of fatal and non-fatal casualties for all railway accidents involving non-railway employees in each year since 1959.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what comparative information he has as to the number of accidents per million passenger train miles operated in the United Kingdom, other European Community countries, the United States of America and Japan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: In 1987, the significant accident rate per million train miles in the United Kingdom was 0·71. Directly comparable data for other countries is not readily available but inquiries are being made with the appropriate authorities. I will write to my hon. Friend when I have further details.

British Rail (Capital Investment)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will detail at constant 1988-89 prices the total capital investment in British Rail in each year since 1959; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail has recently compiled the following table showing investment in the railway since 1948. The figures include investment in Freightliners, BRML and BREL, but exclude the laying of continuous welded track which British Rail does not now classify as investment.

	£ million cash	*£ million 1988-89 prices*
1948	40	572
1949	44	607
1950	43	591
1951	41	519
1952	38	444
1953	56	631
1954	63	710
1955	68	731
1956	90	916
1957	120	1,171
1958	134	1,255
1959	154	1,433
1960	147	1,353
1961	130	1,156
1962	94	810
1963	73	612
1964	83	673
1965	92	709
1966	81	599
1967	65	463
1968	58	401
1969	39	253
1970	48	289
1971	59	328
1972	73	376
1973	81	389
1974	103	432
1975	157	518
1976	176	506
1977	193	484
1978	208	468
1979	248	491
1980	304	501
1981	277	410
1982	243	334
1983	252	329
[1]1984	280	349
1985-86	399	465
1986-87	399	450
1987-88	526	563
1988-89	—	[2]596

[1] 1984-85 was a 15-month financial period. The figure shown for 1984 is the 12-month internally reported result.
[2] Forecast outturn.

Indicative figures for BR's plans for future investment (excluding investment in BREL, which is being sold, and in the proposed high speed link to the Channel tunnel) are:

	£ million
1989-90	740
1990-91	820
1991-92	880
1992-93	820

In order to show the most consistent picture the figures in the table include some elements of "corporate" as well as "railway" investment. BR's standard definitions of these have changed over the years. The figures have been adjusted to current values by the most recent indices and include the latest available information. They show that there was a high level of investment during the modernisation programme of the late 1950s and early 1960s. BR's route mileage now is 45 per cent. less than it was in the peak investment year of 1959, but passenger mileage is currently at broadly the same levels as in 1959.

Commissioners of Irish Lights

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the total income and expenditure of the

Commissioners of Irish Lights for each year from 1985; how much of this sum in each year is spent on navigational aids in the Republic of Ireland; and how much of the income originates in the Republic.

Mr. Portillo: The annual expenditure of the Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) is as follows:

	IR £ million
1985-86	13·4
1986-87	13·7
1987-88	13·5
1988-89	[1]16·4

[1] Estimated.

The expenditure (which in 1988-89 included the purchase of a second-hand ship) is financed by advances from the General Lighthouse Fund (GLF).

Under a financial agreement made with the Irish Government in 1985, 70 per cent. of CIL's total expenditure is deemed to be incurred in the Republic. The principal sources of income in the Republic are light dues and a contribution made by the Irish Government under the 1985 agreement. The income from these sources credited to the GLF is as follows:

IR £ million

	Light dues earned in the Republic	*Financial contribution for year*[1]
1985-86	1·49	1·29
1986-87	1·90	1·32
1987-88	2·20	1·40
1988-89[2]	2·60	1·60

[1] Paid in following year.
[2] Estimated.

In addition, CIL has miscellaneous rental and other income amounting to IR £171,000, IR £170,000, IR £192,000 and IR £193,000 (estimated) in the four years listed above. This income is not broken down on a geographical basis.

Uxbridge (Property Sale)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he received from the district valuer, Harrow, on 28 February and 15 March concerning the external appearance and state of the gardens of the property known as Four Winds, Park road, Uxbridge; what consideration he is giving to the sale of this property in its existing condition; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department acquired "Four Winds" in 1984 following the serving of a blight notice.

Difficulties with the last tenant led to the property being unoccupied from December 1988.

The district valuer wrote to the Department on 27 February and enclosed with his letter an exchange of correspondence he had had with the owner of a neighbouring property about lack of maintenance to "Four Winds" and its garden. The district valuer stated that in order to ensure that the property and gardens were maintained and kept tidy it was necessary to have the property occupied.

The district valuer reaffirmed his advice that the Department should not dispose of this property until completion of the road works.

He has now been instructed to find a tenant.

Radioactive Material

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether radioactive material from Hinkley Point is transported via Combwich wharf; and what plans there are to do so in the future.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No radioactive material is transported via Combwich wharf, neither are there any plans to do so.

Oil Discharges

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations have been conducted by his Department into recent alleged discharges of oil from the ferry Pride of Walmer.

Mr. Portillo: All papers and photographs received by the Department have been passed to the litigation division of the Treasury Solicitor's Department. An inquiry officer of that Department is investigating the alleged incident and in due course will present his findings to the Treasury Solicitor, who will determine whether the evidence is sufficient to justify a prosecution.

Microlight Aircraft

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any proposals to change the law concerning the operation of the legislation and regulations currently in force concerning the safety, operation and construction both in respect of those flying microlight aircraft and those on the ground potentially affected by flying operations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Article 96 of the Air Navigation Order 1985 was recently amended to include a definition of microlight aeroplane. I understand from the Civil Aviation Authority that there are no other changes proposed at the moment specifically affecting microlight aeroplanes.

DEFENCE

Overseas Sales

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the level of sales overseas by the British defence industry.

Mr. Sainsbury: The level of British defence exports remains impressively high, thanks to the efforts of British industry assisted by the Defence Export Services Organisation. Overall figures for United Kingdom defence sales are given annually in the Supplement on the Defence Estimates.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Civil Justice Review

Mr. Favell: To ask the Attorney-General, what are the Government's plans for the implementation of the civil justice review.

The Attorney-General: The Government have considered the report of the review body on civil justice, and

wish to record their gratitude to members of the advisory committee for their contribution to the work of the review over more than three years. In response to the report, the Government have decided to undertake a programme of improvements in the administration of civil justice in England and Wales. This is part of a general overhaul of the legal system, including reforms of child care law. The overall objective of these changes is to improve the service provided by lawyers and the courts to litigants in civil and family cases. The programme for civil justice will be phased over a period of up to five years, to take account of the need for primary and secondary legislation and further policy development, and of the capacity of the legal system to adapt to change in an effective and orderly way.

Jurisdiction and allocation of cases

A more appropriate distribution of business between the High Court and the county courts was identified by the civil justice review as the key to reducing delay and cost. The Government therefore intend, by means of primary legislation, to reserve the High Court for public law and other specialist cases, and for general cases of unusual importance, substance or complexity.

A new system will be introduced to ensure that cases are handled and tried at the appropriate level. The upper financial limit of county court jurisdiction will be removed. Entry to the High Court and eligibility for High Court trial will be regulated. The criteria for allocation of cases will include financial limits applied to particular classes of business. These powers will be exercised to effect a major shift of lower level personal injury cases from the High Court to the county courts. Similar provision will be made in due course for debt cases. Housing possession cases currently dealt with in the High Court will be moved to the county court at a later stage, following discussion with interested parties.

Increases in both the trial jurisdiction of registrars and the upper financial limit of the automatic small claims jurisdiction will complete the new pattern of case distribution, and will help to offset the additional workload for circuit judges resulting from the shift of cases out of the High Court. Development of continuous trial facilities at suitable centres will also help the county courts to absorb an increased volume of cases.

Related procedural changes

The new system of case allocation will be accompanied by a number of changes designed to eliminate unnecessary differences between High Court and county court procedure. Subject to certain exceptions, the same remedies will be available in both courts. An appropriate costs regime will be introduced for common cases and in the longer term, a common core of procedural rules will be developed to cover general High Court and county court business.

Improvements in the handling of cases

A number of procedural changes will be introduced as a means of speeding up and improving the handling of full trial cases in both the High Court and the county courts. The Government intend to give the courts a more active role in the management of case progress, in order to reduce delay before trial. A full system of court control will take some years to achieve, and in the meantime other steps are being taken to reduce pre-trial delay, especially in personal injury cases. The Government consider that the normal permitted period between issue and service of process should be reduced from 12 to four months, and that the court should have power of its own motion to order a split trial, in which the issue of liability is tried in advance of the issue of damages. The object of this is to reduce delay, which may be caused by, for example, waiting for adequate diagnosis of a plaintiff's medical condition.

Other bodies have a role in the reduction of pre-trial delay. One of the principal objectives of the Legal Aid Board is to improve the quality of service provided to users of the legal aid system, and this will include reducing the present level of delay in the handling of applications for civil legal aid. The Home Office will pursue with the police the proposal for early release of accident reports pertaining to civil proceedings. Similarly, revised guidelines will be issued by the Department of Health to health authorities, encouraging early release of medical reports.

New arrangements to encourage openness between parties, including early exchange of witness statements, are expected to encourage settlement in appropriate cases and reduce the length of hearings in cases which go to trial. There will also be new arrangements for the conduct of civil trials, to reduce the need for the lengthy taking of oral evidence.

Debt enforcement and issue of summonses

Arrangements for handling debt enforcement in the county courts will be rationalised so that in the majority of straightforward cases, judgment debts will be payable direct to the creditor. At the same time, a central, computerised summons production centre will be set up to deal more efficiently with the bulk issue of summonses by large creditors.

The division of responsibility for enforcement of judgment debts between county court bailiffs and High Court sheriffs will remain as at present, with the bailiffs' responsibility in county court cases defined by an upper financial limit of £5,000. All High Court judgments, of whatever value, will continue to go to the sheriffs. Various aspects of the system for managing bailiffs are currently being reviewed. Proposals for reform of the sheriff system are under consideration.

Access to justice

The increase in the small claims jurisdiction will be accompanied by procedural improvements, with a view to protecting unrepresented litigants and to encouraging individuals to participate more fully in the handling of small county court cases generally. These improvements include simplified court forms and printed information, and more guidance to unrepresented litigants from court staff.

The Government is planning a number of changes to the handling of housing cases in the counyy courts, including reform of existing possession procedures so as to provide the court with fuller evidence on the basis of the claim and the circumstances of the defendant. Simplified procedures will be introduced to enable landlords to recover rent arrears quickly and cheaply, without recourse to the full possession procedure; and to provide easier access to the court system for tenants and others involved in disputes about matters such as repairs. The precise scope and form of these procedures will be determined after further consultation with court users and others with an interest in housing matters.

Administration order procedures will be reviewed with a view to ensuring that they are used more effectively as a means of dealing with multiple debts.

Closer links between courts and advice agencies will be encouraged, and the Legal Aid Board will be asked to consider, in the context of its other responsibilities, whether agencies whose staff maintain a regular presence at courts, and which provide representation and other services to litigants, should be eligible for funding by the board in respect of such services. Wider availability of lay representation in smaller cases is among the matters put forward for consultation in the Government's recent Green Paper on the legal profession. The precise nature and scope of the service offered by the county courts to litigants in smaller cases will be reviewed when the results of this consultation process are known.

Judicial studies

The Government recognise the importance of enabling the judiciary to keep fully up to date with the new arrangements, particularly in relation to the proposed changes in procedure. The Judicial Studies Board will be invited to develop detailed plans to deal with this.

Other matters

There are a small number of outstanding matters to which further consideration is being given. The usefulness of the hearsay rule and the current machinery for rendering hearsay evidence admissible in civil proceedings will be examined in due course. The case for relaxing the current prohibition on contingency fees has already been opened for re-examination in a recently issued Green Paper. Finally, the Government intend to give effect to the recommendation for a judicial title for registrars.

Law Changes

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Attorney-General how many matters formerly covered by the civil law now come under the auspices of the criminal law and vice versa; which are the principal areas in which change has occurred; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I will write to my hon. Friend.

PRIME MINISTER

Gibraltar (Terrorists)

Q12. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library copies of her correspondence with the Spanish authorities following the deaths of the three suspected IRA terrorists in Gibraltar.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon Friend the Prime Minister has not corresponded with the Spanish authorities over the deaths of the IRA terrorists in Gibraltar.

Environmental Conference

Q22. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister what response she sent to the invitation from the Dutch Government to participate in the environmental conference at The Hague during the week beginning 6 March.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the Prime Minister of the Netherlands that Her Majesty's Government would not be represented at the meeting in The Hague. As my right hon. Friend told the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 23 February, we had a number of reservations about the proposed declaration.

Road Building (London)

Q24. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government expect to make a statement on the future of road building in London.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

We are currently conducting the regular biennial review of the national trunk road programme, including the programme in London. We hope to make an announcement later.

Finchley Central Station.

Q34. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to make an official visit to Finchley central station.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Economic Performance

Q37. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the performance of the economy.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad).

Budget

Q139. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the tax changes in the Budget.

Q206. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the tax changes in the Budget.

Q210. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the tax changes in the Budget.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

The tax changes in the Budget have been widely welcomed.

Fraud

Q171. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister what proposals she will submit to the European Council meeting in Madrid about fraud; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's answer to his question of 2 March 1989 at columns *295-96*.

An important development since then has been the meeting of the Economic and Finance Council on 13 March at which the Commission promised new or revised proposals to combat fraud and mismanagement in a

number of areas, notably agricultural export refunds and intervention storage. Some of these proposals are expected to be tabled before the June meeting of the Economic and Finance Council at which action against fraud will once again be discussed. The Government's approach to the Madrid European Council will reflect the terms of this discussion.

Margaret Marsh

Q188. **Mr. Nicholas Baker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Margaret Marsh.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.
My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to do so.

Quangos

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the number of quangos abolished for each year since 1979 to the present date.

The Prime Minister: The numbers abolished are as follows:

	Number
1979-83	608
1983-84	73
1984-85	75
1985-86	60
1986-87	81
1987-88	40

Information relating to individual years 1979-83 is not available. Figures relate to 1 April each year. Information for 1988-89 will be published in December in "Public Bodies 1989".

Armed Forces (Medical and Dental Officers)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about the pay of medical and dental officers in the armed forces.

The Prime Minister: The armed forces pay review body has submitted to me a supplementary report on the pay of medical and dental officers in the Armed Forces which recommends increases of between 4·7 per cent. and 8·3 per cent. with effect from 1 April 1989. For the majority the recommended increase is 8 per cent. These awards are derived from those to civilian doctors and dentists which I announced in the House on 16 February 1989 and the Government have decided to accept them in full.

The report has been published as Cm 667 and copies are available in the Vote Office.

Engagements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Martin: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 6 April.

Mr. Wakeham: I have been asked to reply.

This morning my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister presided at a meeting of the Cabinet. In the course of the day she will be having meetings with President Gorbachev. This evening she will give a dinner for him.

SCOTLAND

Beef Variable Premium

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cattle herds in Scotland are defined as *(a)* specialist rearing herds and *(b)* finishing herds for the purposes of payment under the variable premium scheme.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Cattle herds were not distinguished for the purposes of payment under the beef variable premium scheme, which ended on 2 April 1989.

Set-aside Scheme

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total number of applications received for set-aside from farmers in each Scottish region to the latest available date, indicating the number of hectares involved in each region.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on 19 December 1988. The closing date for applications to enter the set-aside scheme in 1988 was 21 October.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total level of set-aside arrangements which have been reached to the latest available date, giving a break-down of hectares per Scottish region.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested, in respect of applications accepted by 31 March 1989, is set out in the table.

Region	*Number of applications accepted by 31 March 1989*	*Total set-aside area (hectares)*
Borders	17	867
Central	3	181
Dumfries and Galloway	3	42
Fife	17	718
Grampian	222	6,760
Highland	25	1,143
Lothian	7	351
Orkney Islands Area	—	—
Shetland Islands Area	—	—
Strathclyde	13	268
Tayside	56	1,733
Western Isles Island Area	—	—
All Scotland	363	12,063

National Health Service Grading

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of appeals currently lodged with each of the health boards concerning the clinical grading of National Health Service employees; how many of these appeals have been dealt with; and, of these, how many were upheld.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally.

Community Charge

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest assessment of the number of losers and gainers under the poll tax in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Lang: Our calculations show that the number of households in Scotland gaining and losing as a result of the introduction of the community charge is roughly equal. There is no reason to suppose that the situation in Inverclyde or Strathclyde would be any different.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether British citizens married to United States service men stationed in Scotland are exempt from payment of the community charge as members of visiting forces and their families.

Mr. Lang: No. The exemption for members of visiting forces does not extend to dependants who are citizens of the United Kingdom or who are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom.

Fish Farms

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether owners of fish farms are eligible for compensation from the Government for recent storm damage.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Government have no general financial liability for storm damage. Details of the damage sustained in mid-January and early February, however, have been obtained from local authorities and others affected, including fish farmers. These are now being analysed and my right hon. and learned Friend will be making a statement shortly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Egypt

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Dr. Ashraf Marwan is an accredited diplomat representing the Arab republic of Egypt in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar: According to our records, Doctor Ashraf Marwan is not, nor has ever been, an accredited diplomat representing the Arab republic of Egypt in the United Kingdom.

Soviet Jewry

The Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to those Soviet Jews who are still unable to leave the Soviet Union or who are unable to teach, learn or practise their religion; and if he will list those individuals about whom his Department is aware.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are encouraged by the recent improvements in Soviet human rights, including the granting of exit visas to a number of refuseniks known to us. But while individual gestures are always welcome there are many other cases still to be resolved. We want to see, above all, the fundamental reforms needed to ensure that human rights abuses do not recur. The quantity of such visas should not be dependent on lobbying by Her Majesty's Government and non-governmental organisations nor on the intervention of Mr. Gorbachev or Mr. Shevardnadze, however welcome these interventions may be.

Poland (Talks)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conclusion of the round table talks in Poland.

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that we have all watched events in Poland with fascination in recent weeks.

The round table itself deserves a place in history. We, and others in the West, now hope to see its proposals on political reform put into practice, to the benefit of the Polish people and the whole of Europe. We trust this will be done in such a way that there can be no question of a reversal.

Forty-four years ago at Yalta, the three powers called for free and unfettered elections in Poland. Such elections were never held. Now, for the first time in post-war Poland, we have the prospect of elections in which an opposition has a real chance to participate. This is a remarkable step forward. There is still far to go before the hopes of Yalta can be realised. But let us hope that the forthcoming elections will prepare the way.

Poland still has many problems to confront. The round table produced mainly generalities on economic policy. The Polish authorities and opposition will need to continue to work together to translate these generalities into practical policies. They need to agree an economic adjustment programme which can in due course secure the approval of the international community and financial institutions.

There is a great will here for Poland to succeed. The Government are already spending considerably increased sums to help the Poles help themselves, for example, by providing more training and scholarships. We shall certainly be looking seriously and urgently at other practical, carefully targeted ways of helping the Poles fulfil the hopes for political and economic advance that the round table agreement has raised.

WALES

Gynaecologists

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many gynaecologists are employed in the National Health Service in Wales as a whole and by district; and how many are *(a)* men and *(b)* women in each district.

Mr. Grist: The information, which relates to consultants with a main specialty of obstetrics and gynaecology, is given in the table.

Numbers of consultants in post as at 30 September 1987[1]

Health Authority	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Clwyd	6	—	6
East Dyfed	10	—	10
Gwent	4	1	5
Gwynedd	7	—	7
Mid Glamorgan	6	4	10

Health Authority	Male	Female	Total
Pembrokeshire	2	—	2
Powys	5	—	5
South Glamorgan	6	2	8
West Glamorgan	5	1	6
Wales[2]	39	8	47

[1] Provisional. Excludes locum staff.
[2] Consultants working for more than one authority are shown against each and therefore the Wales total may not be the sum of numbers in individual authorities.

ENERGY

Electricity Prices

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the expected price of electricity over the next five years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The electricity industry is currently announcing its prices for 1989-90. After privatisation, the combination of competition in electricity generation and supply and the controls contained in the public electricity supply licences will put downward pressure on prices.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will update the estimates provided in energy papers 20, 35 and 53, which calculated the reduction in fossil fuel burn that would result from the introduction of combined heat and power, assuming *(a)* the fuel for CHP plant will be coal, gas, or nuclear, and *(b)* a more competitive regime resulting from the privatisation of the electricity industry.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department has no plans to update the estimates made in energy papers 20, 35, 53.

While CHP would reduce the overall primary energy requirement compared to separate production of heat and power the extent of implementation of CHP and the resultant fuel savings will depend on investment decisions of developers. The inherent thermal efficiency of CHP means that it should be well placed to take advantage of the more competitive arrangements resulting from our privatisation proposals.

Reprocessing (Sellafield)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 8 March, column *546*, if he will set out the policy reasons underlying his statement that it is not in the national interest to give timing and operational reasons of reprocessing campaigns at Sellafield.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I have nothing to add to my answer of 8 March 1989, at column *546*.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, in light of the statement to Standing Committee E on the Electricity Bill, 7 March, *Official Report*, column 1480, by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth) that every contract signed to reprocess foreign matter includes a requirement that all the waste products should be sent back to the country of origin, he will state when contracts signed before 1976 for reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel at BNFL Sellafield, which did not originally include such a requirement, were renegotiated to include such a clause.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The pre-1976 contracts to which the hon. Member refers have not been renegotiated to include return of wastes clauses.

Sellafield

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if Her Majesty's Government will give permission to the European Commission to give further details to Llwellyn Smith MEP, in reply to his question, number 881/88 of 2 August 1988, replied to on 21 February 1989 by Commissioner Cardoso E. Cunha on the specific issues of *(a)* the number of installations on the BNFL Sellafield site, *(b)* the number that handle only civil nuclear materials, *(c)* the number also contain simultaneously or sequentially military materials, and *(d)* the number of installations at BNFL Sellafield that have particular safeguard provisions under Commission regulation CR 3227/76 in force.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The particular safeguards provisions for facilities at BNFL Sellafield are currently under discussion and to date four have been brought into force. The additional information requested is confidential.

Hinkley Point C

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what representations he has received about the future use of Combwich wharf resulting from the construction of the proposed Hinkley Point C power station; and what response he has made;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the natural environment near Combwich wharf, Combwich, Somerset and the living conditions of local residents are not adversely affected increased activity resulting from the construction of Hinkley Point C.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB submitted the Central Electricity Generating Board Compulsory Purchase (Combwich) Order 1988 to my right hon. Friend for confirmation on 2 February 1989.

Seventeen statutory objections to the order have been received from owners and occupiers affected by it, together with 68 other objections. A public local inquiry into the order has therefore been arranged.

Mr. Michael Barnes QC has been appointed to hold the public local inquiry which will commence at 9.30 am on Tuesday 13 June 1989 at Cannington court, Church street, Cannington, Bridgewater, Somerset.

Shell (Exploration Licence)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy where exploration licence EXL 083, granted by his Department to Shell in 1986, is available for public inspection; and whether he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Landward exploration licences (EXLs) are not made available for public inspection because they contain commercially confidential information. EXL 083 was issued pursuant to the Petroleum (Production) (Landward Areas) Regulations 1984, S.I.

1984 No. 1832, which sets out the model clauses to be incorporated in such a licence. Copies of these regulations are available in the Library of the House.

Quangos

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations either *(a)* created or *(b)* closed, since 1979 for which he has departmental responsibility; and how many people he appoints to these bodies.

Mr. Parkinson *[holding answer 5 April 1989]:* The following non-departmental public bodies were created:

Oil and Pipelines Agency[1]
Offshore Safety and Technology Board
Renewable Energy Advisory Committee
Offshore Industry Advisory Board

and the following were abolished:

Advisory Committee on Fixed Offshore Installations
Energy Commission
Offshore Safety Committee
Advisory Council on Energy Conservation

In addition the Office of Gas Supply, a non-ministerial department, was established under the Gas Act 1986. The Director General of Gas Supply was appointed under the terms of the Act.

Information on appointments, excluding those relating to Ofgas, can be obtained from "Public Bodies 1988", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Questions about the staffing of Ofgas are a matter for the Director General of Gas Supply.

[1] The Oil and Pipelines Agency took over responsibility for the property, rights and liabilities of the British National Oil Corporation on 1 December 1985.

EMPLOYMENT

Claimant Advisers

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice his Department issues on the personal liability claimant advisers have if the advice they give to claimants about in-work benefits is incorrect and as a consequence the claimant loses money and is much worse off in work than was suggested to them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: When giving advice on in-work benefits, claimant advisers are specifically instructed that any personal calculations provided should be clearly shown as estimates only and that entitlements can be assessed only when applications are properly made. The following disclaimer is included:

"Entitlements can only be assessed when applications are properly made and processed. The calculations below are therefore estimates only. The Department will not accept liability for loss occasioned if reliance is placed upon them".

Restart

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what happens to the newly, and any previously, completed RR6s that claimants have to fill in as part of their restart interview; and whether they can be passed on to other restart counsellors or claimant advisers, or other members of the employment service, such as fraud investigators.

Mr. Lee: Restart clients complete a restart interview form (RR6) every six months. The most recent form is kept with the client's records at the local office. Previous forms are usually destroyed. The RR6 may be passed on to other members of the employment service who are involved in follow-up reviews or concerned with entitlement to benefit.

Claimants

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether, after a claimant has filled in an availability questionnaire, either a UB671 or an RR6, they can *(a)* subsequently obtain a copy of their answers on request; and *(b)* change their answers to the questions before or when they are passed on to an adjudication officer.

Mr. Lee: Yes.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

181. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the cost of increasing child benefit in line with earnings in each of the last two years.

182. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the cost of increasing child benefit in line with earnings in each of the last two years.

183. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the cost of increasing child benefit in line with earnings in each of the last two years.

184. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the cost of increasing child benefit in line with earnings in each of the last two years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: After taking account of the uprating in April 1987, the additional cost (net of savings on other benefits) would have been about £70 million in 1987-88 and a further £260 million in 1988-89.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the papers relevant to his Department's re-estimation of the numbers eligible to receive family credit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We will do so shortly.

ENVIRONMENT

Rents

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the average level of registered rents being set for *(a)* a one-bedroom flat, *(b)* a two-bedroom flat, and *(c)* a three-bedroom flat or house, in (i) inner London and (ii) the borough of Islington, in December 1986, December 1987, and now.

Mr. Trippier: The available estimates for each of the last three years are given in the table. Monthly estimates are based on samples too small to give reliable figures.

Annual average registered rents in regulated properties £ per annum[1,2]

	1986		1987		1988	
	Islington	*Inner London*	*Islington*	*Inner London*	*Islington*	*Inner London*
Flats with one habitable[3] room	897	1,161	1,420	1,357	845	1,394
Flats with two habitable rooms	979	1,174	1,077	1,283	1,199	1,444
Houses or flats with three or more habitable rooms	1,229	1,360	1,282	1,454	1,366	1,612

[1] Rents for rooms let as part of a house or flat are not included.
[2] Under pre-1988 legislation rents were registered for two years at a time so 1987 figures are not strictly comparable with 1986.
[3] Excluding bathrooms, kitchens, WCs, hallways, attics used for storage and cellars.

Rating Reform

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the guidance to be sent to general practitioners on community charge exemption processing for those who are severely mentally impaired.

Mr. Gummer: When the guidance to general practitioners has been finalised, a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements are being made to financially support local authorities for revenue forgone on individuals exempt from the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: The distribution of the needs grant will take into account the fact that authorities will raise no community charge income from exempt persons.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the rights of appeal available to residents of premises where a collective community charge is payable on the level of their contribution to the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: The level of the daily contribution is fixed by statute as the daily rate of the charging authority's personal community charge. There is no appeal against the level of the personal community charge and, therefore, similarly there is no appeal against the level of the statutory contribution. Information on the correct level of contributions will be available from the charging authority.

Council House Sales

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses purchased by council tenants under the right-to-buy scheme have since been resold to the local authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Information on the repurchase of ex-council houses sold under the right-to-buy scheme is not available.

Dog Registration Scheme

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an estimate of the annual cost of implementing a dog registration scheme on the basis proposed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals on the assumption that such costs are borne *(a)* by dog owners and *(b)* by the Exchequer.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. The setting up of a national dog registration scheme would require elaborate bureaucratic machinery. The Government do not intend to introduce such a scheme and therefore no estimate has been made of the costs involved.

Parish Councils

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his best estimates of the total amount of business rate income lost to parish councils with *(a)* a population of more than 10,000 and *(b)* a population of less than 10,000 due to the introduction of the community charge in April 1990.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* I have made no such estimates of the effects of the national non-domestic rate on individual parish councils.

House of Commons Cleaners

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the cleaners in the House of Commons use biodegradable cleaning products.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The cleaning products purchased by the parliamentary works office for use by the House of Commons staff are biodegradable. Some cleaning work is also undertaken by a contractor who is responsible for providing his own materials. I understand that the cleaning materials they use are also biodegradable.

Sewage Treatment Works

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those sewage treatment works in each English water authority which discharged effluent below the required standard for the most recent year for which full figures are available.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Copies of reports from water authorities, listing those sewage treatment works which failed to comply with their discharge consents in 1987, are available in the Library of the House. I expect shortly to publish results for 1988.

Bathing Waters

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his answers to the hon. Member for Norwich, South on 20 March, *Official Report*, columns

421-22 and 21 March, *Official Report* columns *506-7*, if he will list in the *Official Report* the number and location of beaches in 1988 in the EEC guide and mandatory levels for those standards in respect of cadmium, arsenic, pesticides, nitrogen, ammonia, phosphates and faecal streptococci in bathing waters which were the responsibility of the Anglian water authority, which are not listed in the summary of the 1988 "Survey of Bathing Waters" he has placed in the Library.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The report placed in the Library contains all the information reported to the Department by the Anglian water authority in connection with the 1988 bathing water quality survey.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who were the two London residuary body board members identified in the 1987-88 accounts to be in receipt of emoluments in the range £20,000 to £25,000; and how many days per week each of them worked.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Mr. Jack Esling and Mr. Michael Roberts. Their remuneration as members of the London residuary body board during 1987-88 was based on time commitments of four and three days a week respectively.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the London residuary body decided to levy the sum of £297,000 in 1989-90 on the outer London boroughs; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The levy is required to meet the costs of pension payments to former magistrates courts' staff.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what properties have been disposed of by the London residuary body to the London docklands development corporation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* None, but negotiations are in hand on a number of properties.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what sum was received by the London residuary body for the sale of the freehold interest in 45-59 Albion street, Southwark, to Storechart Property Ltd.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The disposal of 45-59 Albion street Southwark has yet to be completed.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what matters remain to be resolved as between his Department and the London residuary body in respect of the Greater London Supplies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Discussions about the future of Greater London Supplies are continuing between the Department of the Environment, the Department of Education and Science, the London residuary body and the Inner London education authority.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the days worked each week by the part-time appointees to the London residuary body; and what was the sum each received in the financial year 1988-89.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The time commitments of part-time members of the London residuary body to LRB work and their salaries during 1988-89 were as follows:

		£ per annum	
	Number of days per week	*(from 1 April 1988)*	*(from 1 October 1988)*
Mr. Alan Blakemore, CBE	2	13,608	13,972
Mr. Jack Esling	2	13,608	13,972
Mr. Jack Wolkind, CBE	2	13,608	13,972
Mr. Wallace Mackenzie, OBE	2½	17,010	17,240
Mr. Michael Roberts	3	20,412	20,688
Cllr. Sir Peter Bowness, CBE	1	6,804	6,896

Remuneration is subject to abatement, if applicable, in respect of public sector pension received.

Information on the total remuneration paid to board members in 1988-89 will be contained in the LRB's annual report and accounts for that financial year, which will be laid before Parliament in the autumn.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom the London residuary body's freehold interest in the Matthews yard residential properties and the shops at 27 and 29 Shorts gardens WC2 was sold; and what was the disposal price in each case and collectively.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* This is a matter for the London residuary body and the purchaser.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom the London residuary body's freehold interest in Bush house was sold; and what was the disposal price.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* This is a matter for the London residuary body and the purchaser.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the disposal decision of the London residuary body in respect of 100-124 Shaftesbury avenue to Gratex Ltd. was changed in favour of Carmellia Holdings Ltd; and what was the disposal price.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* In this case the name of the purchasing firm was changed in the course of the transaction. Information on the disposal price is a matter for the London residuary body and the purchaser.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the sale of the London residuary body's freehold interest in Southwark bridge business centre to Mackenzie and Campbell House Ltd; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The London residuary body has yet to decide on the disposal of its interest.

Thames Flood Warning

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he proposes will exist beyond 30 April in respect of the Thames tidal flood warning system.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Recent meetings involving London boroughs, Government Departments and the London residuary body have concluded that it is for the boroughs using the powers available to them to consider the future of the tidal flood warning system.

Unitary Plans

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the timetable for the submission of unitary plans to his Department.

Mr. Howard: Once a commencement order has been made following the issue of strategic guidance by the Secretary of State, an authority is required to prepare its unitary development plan. DOE circular 3/88 advises that authorities should publish their draft plans within two years of commencement. Those with a good up-to-date local plan base should achieve this stage within one year of commencement.

Commencement orders were made for the west midlands and Merseyside in 1988. Commencement orders for London and the remaining metropolitan areas are likely to be issued by the summer.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cattle Herds

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle herds in England and Wales are defined as *(a)* specialist rearing herds and *(b)* finishing herds for the purposes of payment under the variable premium scheme.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Cattle herds were not distinguished for the purposes of payment under the beef variable premium scheme, which ended on 2 April 1989.

Sheepmeat Regime

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he anticipates completion of negotiations on the European Community sheepmeat regime; if he will make a statement on the current state of these negotiations; and what account he has taken of the importance attached by farmers to store sales.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Discussions on the EC Commission's proposals for changes to the sheepmeat regime have made little progress. Negotiations may well continue for some time. I am well aware of the desirability of ensuring that any changes to the regime are introduced with sufficient notice so that farmers can plan ahead, particularly when making purchases at store sales.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the pound sterling equivalent of the per ewe payment allocated to farmers in each member state of the European Community under the sheepmeat regime as presently constituted.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Commission regulation setting rates of ewe premium is due to be published shortly. I will write to the hon. Member when the details are available.

Set-aside Schemes

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the current level of progress on set-aside schemes in each member state of the European Community, showing such progress as percentage of levels currently attained in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ryder: The United Kingdom was the first member state to implement the set-aside scheme, and others remain at various stages of implementation. No figures are yet available for Luxembourg and Denmark, who are still in the process of introducing schemes, and for Greece and Italy, who are still receiving applications for their schemes. The schemes in most other member states are also still open for applications, and the figures for uptake are therefore provisional. Portugal does not yet have to apply a scheme.

The information available to date on uptake in other member states compared with set-aside in the United Kingdom of about 58,000 hectares is as follows:

	Hectares set-aside	*Percentage of United Kingdom hectares set-aside*
Belgium	383	0·7
France	2,409	4·2
Ireland	1,918	3·3
Netherlands	1,222	2·1
Spain	6,202	10·8
Germany	170,635	296·2

Cereal Substitutes

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the level of imports into the United Kingdom of cereal substitutes in each of the past five years.

Mr. Ryder: The following table shows the total tonnage of materials on the European Community list of cereal substitutes imported into the United Kingdom in each of the most recent five years.

Calendar year	*Imports of cereal substitutes (thousand tonnes)*
1984	1,048
1985	1,038
1986	1,035

Calendar year	Imports of cereal substitutes (thousand tonnes)
1987	1,091
1988	1,099

NORTHERN IRELAND

Road Programmes

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the individual costings of the following road programmes covered by the additional £8·7 million recently announced by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment: both the M1 and M2 motorways, route A4 Dungannon to Enniskillen, route A2 near Carrickfergus, Bushmills and Ballykelly, route A37 between Coleraine and Limavady, route A20 Newtownards to Portaferry and Mountstewart, route A23 Belfast to Ballygowan, near Castlereagh, route A54 at Castleroe, near Coleraine, route A24 Belfast to Newcastle, near Seaforde and route A7 Carryduff to Saintfield, near Carryduff and Lisdoonan.

Mr. Needham: Individual costings of road maintenance works on the routes named are as follows:

M1 and M2 motorways—£618,000 (M1 £568,000, M2 £50,000)
Route A4—Dungannon to Enniskillen—£450,000
Route A2—near Carrickfergus, Bushmills and Ballykelly—£213,000
Route A37—between Coleraine and Limavady—£86,000
Route A20—Newtownards to Portaferry and Mountstewart—£76,000
Route A23—Belfast to Ballygowan, near Castlereagh—£116,000
Route A54—At Castleroe, near Coleraine—£28,000
Route A24—Belfast to Newcastle, near Seaforde—£43,000
Route A7—Carryduff to Saintfield, near Carryduff and Lisdoonan—£93,000

The works are representative of maintenance works carried out throughout Northern Ireland.

Medical Practices (Patients)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his written reply of 11 January to the right hon. Member for Strangford, *Official Report*, columns *693-94*, how many persons are on the lists of each of the three medical practices based at Portaferry and Kircubbin.

Mr. Needham: Information about the number of patients on a general medical practitioner's list is treated as confidential and may not be disclosed without the permission of the doctor concerned.

Griffiths Report

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish his Department's reponse and observations on Sir Roy Griffiths' report "Care in the Community-Agenda for Action"; and what advice his Department is giving to health and social services boards as to how they should plan their services in the light of the findings in this report.

Mr. Needham: Sir Roy Griffiths was asked by the Secretary of State for Social Services to review the way in which public funds are used to support community care policy specifically in England and to advise on possible ways of improving the use of those funds to achieve a more effective delivery of community care. The issues raised by his report are being considered by the Government. The conclusions reached will be of interest throughout the United Kingdom, but differences in the arrangements for the management of community care in the various parts of the United Kingdom will have to be taken into account in framing proposals for action.

Sexual Abuse (Children)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what Government-funded research into the sexual abuse of children *(a)* has taken place since 1979, *(b)* is currently taking place and *(c)* is under consideration, giving the cost of each project listed.

Mr. Needham: The Department of Health and Social Services has provided £46,250 to finance the Northern Ireland children's study. The study, undertaken by a research team from the department of child psychiatry at the Royal Belfast hospital for sick children and the department of community medicine and medical statistics at the Queen's university of Belfast, investigates the incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland. The findings should be published later this year. Proposals for following up the study by further research into questions about the incidence of child sexual abuse in Northern Ireland are being considered.

Housing

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the sums tendered for the demolition of each block of flats in the Bogside, Londonderry; when the work began and finished; when the last contract let begins and finishes; what technical standards are required of contractors tendering; if the Housing Executive employed outside consultants and what consultancy fees have been paid or are pending in respect of each stage of the work.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 22 March 1989]:* This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the chief executive has advised me that the tenders accepted for the demolition of the Rossville flats in Londonderry were as follows:

	£
Block 1	128,860
Blocks 2 and 3	297,800

The demolition contract for block 1 commenced on 30 June 1986 and was completed on 10 April 1987. Work on the demolition of blocks 2 and 3 began on 6 February 1989 with an estimated completion period of 30 weeks. All tenderers are required to be on the Housing Executive's register of approved contractors and have specialist insurance.

The executive employed a consultant who received a fee of £14,375 in respect of block 1. The fee to be paid for the demolition of blocks 2 and 3 is estimated at about £23,500.

Access to Information

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to extend to Northern

Ireland the change in the law introduced by *(a)* the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, *(b)* the Access to Personal Files Act 1987, and *(c)* the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Many of the functions carried out by local authorities in Great Britain are carried out by central Government in Northern Ireland. There are no plans at present to introduce legislation similar to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

A draft Northern Ireland Order in Council, which will contain provisions corresponding to the Access to Personal Files Act 1987 and the Access to Medical Reports Act 1988, is currently in preparation.

Self-governing Hospitals

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what guidance he is issuing to health and social services boards as to the identification of hospitals which may wish to apply for self-governing status; what information he has about any hospital in Northern Ireland being a candidate for this status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* On 23 March 1989, I announced the publication of seven working papers which describe in greater detail how particular proposals outlined in the White Paper "Working for Patients" (Cm 555) will be implemented in Northern Ireland. Copies are available in the Library.

Working paper 1 "Self Governing Hospitals in Northern Ireland" makes it clear that the Government regard all hospitals as potentially eligible for self-governing status, but it is likely to be particularly appropriate to major acute hospitals with over 250 beds and I would expect initial proposals to come from this type of hospital.

Stolen Weapons

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *395*, if he will state the number of weapons stolen from police stations in Northern Ireland in each of the categories from 1970 to the present date.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* As I indicated in the answer given to the hon. Member on 23 January 1989 at column *395*, centralised records do not differentiate between the actual sources of theft.

Mr. Peter Bell (Bombing)

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as to the stage which investigations have reached into the bombing of the home of Mr. Peter Bell, a civil servant working for his Department.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* A bomb explosion occurred on 12 March 1976 between the homes of Mr. Bell and another civil servant. Although there was extensive damage to both houses no one was injured in the explosion. I understand that the police file in this case remains open.

HEALTH

Organ Donors

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request regional health authorities to include the words, "Are you an organ donor?" on all hospital admission forms.

Mr. Freeman: No. The working party chaired by Sir Raymond Hoffenberg examined this suggestion and considered that it would increase the anxiety of patients entering hospital. It would be unlikely to increase substantially the availability of organs because most potential donors are unconcious on admission to hospital.

Prescriptions

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has as to the total saving which has been made by the National Health Service since the limited list was introduced.

Mr. Mellor: In 1985-86 the selected list scheme saved £75 million on the drugs bill. It is difficult to make meaningful estimates for subsequent years but we have no reason to doubt that significant savings continue to be made.

Cook-chill Food

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the revised guidelines on cook-chill will be published.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 24 February 1989 to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley) at columns *824-25*.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there will be stiffer regulations regarding temperature control of cook-chill food in the revised guidelines on cook-chill.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department's expert group and the relevant recent research have confirmed that the temperature controls specified in the 1980 guidelines are still appropriate and they are likely to form the basis of the guidance given in the revised guidelines when these are published.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what scientific advice has been taken by his Department in revising the guidelines on cook-chill.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My Department convened an expert group to review the guidelines on cook-chill catering systems and they provided the core of the scientific advice during the review.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to introduce new statutory powers governing the preparation of cook-chill foods.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The preparation of cook-chill foods is subject to the requirement of the Food Act 1984 and the regulations made under that Act, in the same way as any other food business. Following extensive consultation, the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970 are currently being reviewed.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he intends to take and what proposals he

intends to include in the revised guidelines on cook-chill to ensure a high microbiological quality of food used in cook-chill.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: During the review of the existing guidelines my Department's scientific expert group considered the recommended microbiological criteria and considered them to be satisfactory. They took the view that providing the 1980 guidelines were followed, they would provide food of sound microbiological quality. However, absence of listeria monocytogenes has been included in the recommended microbiological specification.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he intends to take and what proposals he intends to include in the revised guidelines on cook-chill to ensure adequate hygiene education and training of cook-chill food handlers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The production of cook-chill foods covered by the guidelines is subject to the requirements of the Food Act 1984 and the regulations made under that Act, as are all food businesses.

Following extensive consultation the Food Act and its regulations are currently being reviewed and the present proposals include regulation-making powers for Government to require appropriate hygiene training for those involved in food handling.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many studies, and at what cost, his Department has conducted into the microbiological quality of cook-chill foods.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 9 February at columns *780-81* which provides details amongst others of research funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which is of relevance to the microbiological quality of cook-chill foods.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where his Department intends to conduct any further research into the microbiological quality of cook-chill foods.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I see no need at this stage to conduct further research into the microbiological quality of conventional cook-chill foods other than that already sponsored by Government.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he intends to take and what proposals he intends to include in the revised guidelines on cook-chill to prevent cross-contamination in the preparation of cook-chill foods.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The guidance on proper time and temperature control and the separation of cooked and uncooked food during the production process in the existing guidelines are intended to reduce the microbiological contamination to a minimum.

I expect these points will be emphasised in the reviewed guidelines.

Drug Abuse

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on the incidence of HIV amongst drug users.

Mr. Mellor: The following table shows the cumulative totals of AIDS cases and HIV anti-body positive reports at the end of February 1989.

	AIDS Cases (United Kingdom figures)				*HIV anti-body positive (England and Wales)*		
	Men	*Women*	*Total*[1]		*Men*	*Women*	*Total*[2]
Total	2,031	72	2,103	(1,116)	7,358	557	8,025
Injecting drug users only	31	12	43	(22)	418	219	642
Injecting drug users who are homosexual	33	—	33	(15)	72	—	72

[1] Deaths shown in brackets
[2] Includes small number where sex not specified

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on the funding of Mainliners.

Mr. Mellor: Mainliners, a voluntary organisation recently formed to help HIV positive drug users, has applied for a grant towards its administrative expenses to be incurred in 1989-90. The Department has notified Mainliners that, while we value the work that it is doing in this field, its current work is too local to fall within the scope of the general grant scheme that the Department operates under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968.

Airline Food (Safety)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has now received a copy of the report, "A Survey of Microbiological Quality of Airline Foods", by the London boroughs of Hillingdon and Hounslow and Spelthorne borough council; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have just received a copy of the report and I will give it due consideration.

Project 2000

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his reply of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *189*, he can give any estimate of when *(a)* the level of bursary for a nursing student enrolling on a course under the Project 2000 nursing education reforms will be announced, and *(b)* the arrangements for the longer term administration of such bursaries will be determined; and if he will make a statement on the progress towards the implementation of the Project 2000 reforms so far.

Mr. Mellor: We intend to make an announcement shortly on the level of bursaries for Project 2000 nursing students and the arrangements for administration. On

progress on Project 2000 generally, my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 3 April that approval had been given to the development of Project 2000 courses in the following districts/schools of nursing:

East Suffolk and Great Yarmouth
Crewe and Macclesfield
Newcastle
North East Essex
Parkside
North and South Bedfordshire
North Manchester
North West Surrey/South West Surrey/West Surrey and North East Hampshire
Avon
Sheffield
North Staffordshire
Portsmouth and Isle of Wight
Winchester and Basingstoke

Subject to detailed discussions about cost and manpower assumptions, and the receipt of educational approval from the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting, these courses should start in the autumn of this year or, in some cases, in early 1990.

HEALTH

Community Care

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms his Department has established to oversee the transfer of residents of long-stay institutions to the community; and if they are working satisfactorily.

Mr. Mellor: It is for health authorities, in consultation with social services departments and other care agencies to determine arrangements for the transfer of residents of long-stay institutions to the community. The annual accountability review process is the principal mechanism by which health authorities' performance across the whole range of their activities is monitored by the Department. During the course of this year, we intend to get a clearer picture of the development of mental health services throughout the country. The objective is to provide us with a properly informed basis for considering whether there are any steps it would be right and proper for us to take to improve the care of mentally disordered people, including former long-stay patients now in the community.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he now expects to respond to the report by Sir Roy Griffiths on community care;

(2) if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on community care.

Mr. Mellor: We remain committed to a policy of promoting the development of community services so that people can return to, or remain in, the community and live as independently as possible, wherever this is best for them. We are currently giving active consideration to the future organisation and management of community care following Sir Roy Griffiths' report and hope to be in a position to bring forward our own proposals in the near future.

Residential Care

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients have been moved from hospital care into residential care in each of the last five years;

(2) what are his Department's estimates of the numbers of mentally ill and mentally handicapped people not receiving long-stay hospital care in each of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: The numbers of discharges from mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and units in England directly into residential care are not available centrally.

Many of the National Health Service patients discharged from mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and units after a stay of one year or more will transfer to residential care.

The table shows the numbers of patients discharged to the community from National Health Service mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and units in England after a stay of one year or more, for the last five years for which information is currently available. The figures exclude deaths, and transfers to another hospital.

Discharges from mental illness and mental handicap hospitals and units, England (1982 to 1986)

Year	Mental illness	Mental handicap	Total
1982	3,465	1,229	4,694
1983	3,563	1,457	5,020
1984	3,928	1,919	5,847
1985	3,441	2,052	5,493
1986	3,751	2,528	6,279

Day Care

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many day care places for mentally ill and mentally handicapped people were available in each of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows the number of day places allocated on the last full working day of each year at National Health Service day hospitals; the number of day care places at single specialty mental illness and mental handicap hospitals are excluded as the data were not centrally collected.

The table also shows the number of day care places provided by local authority social services departments in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Number of day care places in England for people with a mental illness or mental handicap, 1983-87

	Number of places in NHS day hospitals for		Number of places provided by local authority social services departments for	
Year	Mental illness	Mental handicap	Mental illness[1]	Mental handicap
1983	16,293	1,142	8,689	46,558
1984	16,996	1,195	8,919	47,464
1985	17,903	1,519	9,308	48,824
1986	18,661	1,528	9,216	50,374
1987	n/a	n/a	9,993	51,732

[1] Including places made available to local authorities by voluntary or private organisations and estimates of places for mentally ill people in day centres for mixed client groups.

Since 1987-88, data have been collected on available place-days at all National Health Service day care facilities for mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients. In 1987-88 there were 5·36 million place-days for mental illness day care and 1·02 million place-days for mental handicap day care. Most of these day care facilities are open five days a week.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the rate of provision of day care places for the elderly per 1,000 people aged 75 years and over in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: The available information for *(a)* National Health Service hospitals and *(b)* local authority social service departments is given in the tables.

Table 1
Geriatric medicine: Day care attendances, 1982 to 1987-88 and available place days, 1987-88 only
National Health Service hospitals in England

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987-88*
Rates per thousand population 75 +					
Available place days	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	713·5
New patients	24·2	23·8	25·2	24·9	23·4
TOTAL ATTENDANCES	552·4	540·8	525·1	525·0	498·0

Table 2
Number of day care places for the elderly per 1,000 people aged 75 or over provided by local authority social services departments in England: 1983-87[1]

	Number of places per 1,000 population aged 75 or over
As at 31 March	
1983	13.3
1984	13·3
1985	13·4
1986	13·5
1987	13·4

[1] Including estimates of places for the elderly in day centres for mixed client groups and day care places in local authority residential accommodation.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Research Assistants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North, *Official Report*, 20 March, column *455*, if he will arrange for the register signed by research assistants using the Library to be available for inspection by hon. and right hon. Members.

Mr. Wakeham: The register signed by research assistants using the Members' Library is kept permanently in the Oriel Room of the Library. It can be made available on request to any right hon. or hon. Member who wishes to inspect it.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 7 April 1989

TRANSPORT

London Underground

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the railways inspectorate has completed its study of London Underground's management systems.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that the study has been completed. I am expecting the report in a few weeks.

HOME DEPARTMENT

London Underground (Fire Certification)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to introduce an order to resolve the legal uncertainty about fire certification on the London Underground.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 1 February at columns *209-10*. The order came into force on 1 April.

London Underground (Fire Precautions)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make regulations under section 12 of the Fire Preventions Act 1971 to require specified fire precautions at all Underground stations.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend expects to do this in May. Detailed consultation is now being undertaken on their content.

Sizewell Inquiry (Objectors' Meetings)

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek a report from the chief constable of Essex on what steps he intends to take to investigate the bugging of meetings of objectors to the pressurised water reactor at the Sizewell inquiry.

Mr. Hurd: No.

Segregated Prisoners

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been placed in segregation by the governor of Her Majesty's prison, Albany in the last six months for suspected criminal offences; and how many of these have actually been charged with an offence.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: During the six months ended 31 March 1989, 25 prisoners at Albany prison were placed in segregation pending investigation of matters which might have led to criminal charges. None of these was charged with a criminal offence.

Hizbollah

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to seek powers to proscribe any British branch of the Hizbollah formed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: No.

Prison Officers (Dog Handlers)

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether consideration is being given to the possible withdrawal from the prison service of prison officer dog handlers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Consideration is being given to the use of other grades of staff for some tasks now undertaken by prison officers. This includes some tasks in dog sections.

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether consideration is being given to the employment of private agencies to police penal establishments with dogs as an alternative to prison officer dog handlers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No current consideration is being given to the employment of private agencies in this area.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much has been spent on the assisted places scheme in each of the last five years; and what is the estimate for the current year.

Mr. Butcher: The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	*Expenditure (£ million)*
1984-85	22·2
1985-86	29·6
1986-87	37·9
1987-88	46·0
1988-89	[1]52·3
1989-90	[2]59·0

[1] Forecast outturn.
[2] Provision in Estimates.

Departmental Advertising, Publicity and Publications

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what has delayed the finalisation of his Department's 1989-90 estimates for advertising, publicity and publications;

(2) whether the estimates for his Department's spending on advertising, publicity and publications for 1989-90 have yet been finalised.

Mrs. Rumbold: The estimated expenditure on Departmental advertising, publicity and publications for 1989-90 has now been determined at £2·4 million.

In addition, the Department estimates that expenditure on publications and information concerned with the national curriculum will be about £2·7 million.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why the estimated expenditure by his Department on publications, videos, exhibitions etc. in 1988-89 exceeded by £1 million the estimate he gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 21 July 1988, *Official Report*, column 744; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Expenditure in 1988-89 is higher than the original estimate because of the need to give certain of the Department's publications a wide circulation and because of additional publications such as "Our Changing Schools: a handbook for parents". This is an example of a publication giving valuable information for parents which has been very well received. Well over 3 million copies have been distributed.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Attorney-General what resources in the Crown prosecution service are allocated to offences relating to drug trafficking.

The Attorney-General: Drug trafficking cases are dealt with as part of the normal work of the Crown prosecution service. Resources are allocated as required by the number and weight of such cases. In addition it is the policy of the Director of Public Prosecutions that at least one lawyer in each of the 31 Crown prosecution service areas should have attended a specialist training course with regard to the provisions of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986. That person will, in addition to his normal casework, either deal personally with cases arising under this Act or provide advice and assistance to colleagues who are dealing with such cases.

Committal for Trial (Northern Circuit)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Attorney-General what has been the change in waiting times from committal for trial until start of hearings in the northern circuit since 1979.

The Attorney-General: The table shows the change in waiting times, since 1979, both for those committed in custody and those committed on bail.

Average Waiting Time in weeks from date of committal to start of hearing—Northern Circuit

	Committed in custody	*Committed on bail*	*Total Committals*
1979	11·3	17·5	16·2
1980	10·4	16·7	15·6
1981	9·6	15·1	13·9
1982	12·1	15·2	14·5
1983	8·9	12·6	11·8
1984	8·3	12·1	11·2
1985	8·7	11·4	10·7
1986	8·4	10·8	10·2
1987	7·3	10·0	9·2
1988	7·5	10·6	9·7

Legal Profession

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many additional civil servants he estimates will be required if the recent Green Papers on the legal profession are implemented;

(2) if he will make a statement as to the estimated additional cost to public funds arising out of the implementation of the recent Green Papers on the legal profession.

The Attorney-General: The Green Papers are consultation documents, which seek the views of both the public and the legal profession on the Government's provisional proposals for changes in the way in which legal services are to be provided in the future. No firm estimates based on settled policy can therefore be made, but it is anticipated that the implementation of the proposals contained in the Green Papers would not entail any additional cost to public funds but would be broadly cost neutral.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Czechoslovakia

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Czechoslovakian Government with regard to the case of Vaclav Havel.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made repeated representations to the Czechoslovak Government over Vaclav Havel, most recently on 23 February. I take this opportunity to reiterate that we deplore the treatment of Havel, who is a distinguished writer; such treatment is contrary to Czechoslovakia's commitments under the Vienna concluding document.

Central America

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the United States bipartisan accord on central America; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The accord announced on 24 March explicitly offers United States support for the peace and democratisation process in central America, and for the goals embodied in the Esquipulas II agreement. It puts emphasis on the need for democratisation in Nicaragua, and calls for progress towards strengthening civilian leadership, the defence of human rights and the consolidation of free, open, safe political processes elsewhere in the region. It calls for credible standards of compliance, strict timetables and effective means of verification. It supports the use of "incentives and disincentives" to achieve these United States policy objectives.

United States policy is of course a matter for the United States. But we have consistently supported the peace process and we welcome the United States Government's new diplomatic strategy. For our part, we shall continue to urge on all parties the need for early and full compliance with the commitments which the central American presidents freely undertook in the Esquipulas, Alajuela and El Tesoro summits.

Child Benefit

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of how many families with children would not have gained from an increase in child benefit in April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moore: Increasing child benefit would not help the 1.5 million families who receive income-related benefits. We believe it best to concentrate help on those who most need it. That is why almost all children in families claiming income-related benefits will get an extra 50p per week this April over and above the amount needed to maintain the real value of benefits. These benefits do hit their targets. Experience shows that almost £9 out of every £10 of available income-related benefits is claimed, and nearly four out of five families eligible actually get them. For families who do not rely on income-related benefits (and around 70 per cent. of them have incomes above average male earnings), £7.25 child benefit a week per child is a worthwhile recognition of the extra cost of bringing up a family.

Earnings

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many workers currently earn below the national insurance contributions lower earnings limit; and how many of them are *(a)* part-time women, and *(b)* part-timers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: About 2.5 million people will earn less than the lower earnings limit in 1989-90; 95 per cent. are part-timers, and about seven out of eight of these are women.

ENVIRONMENT

Seal Skins

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if Her Majesty's Government have investigated or intend to investigate the allegations that blueback or whitecoat seal skins have been illegally imported into the United Kingdom in contravention of Community directive 85/444; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if Her Majesty's Government intend to support an indefinite extension of the European Economic Community import ban on seal skins in Community directive 85/444; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 6 March 1989 at column *426*.

Rights of Way (Public Inquiries)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the handbook of guidance notes for inspectors holding public inquiries into rights of way cases.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance for inspectors dealing with rights of way casework is to be found in section D8 of the inspector's handbook. A copy of the handbook is already in the Library.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the functions and responsibilities transferred from the London residuary body to the City of London since its inception.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Particular responsibilities for Hampstead heath, some pipe subways, some records, portraits and paintings and the sub-mariners war memorial have been transferred on agreed terms to the corporation of the City of London from the London residuary body.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the item proposed by the London residuary body to be transferred from the Middlesex Guildhall collection to the London borough of Harrow.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The London residuary body hopes that all the items making up the Middlesex Guildhall collection will be transferred to one owner. Discussions on this are in hand with the London borough of Harrow.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the relocation of the London residuary body; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* This is a matter for the London residuary body.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom the London residuary body's freehold interest in Wilton's Music Hall was sold; and what was the disposal price.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* the disposal of Wilton's Music hall has yet to be completed.

Hampstead Heath

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why he rejected the possibility of a transfer of Hampstead heath from the London residuary body to the London borough of Camden; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The transfer of Hampstead heath to the London borough of Camden was not proposed to my right hon. Friend by the London residuary body.

Greater London Council (Tape Recordings)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the whereabouts of the tape recordings of the last meeting of the Greater London council, held on 27 March 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

County Hall, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the terms of the proposed purchase of county hall by the County Hall Development Group plc; and what is the envisaged timetable for the adaptation of county hall.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The terms are for the vendor and purchaser to agree. The developers have recently submitted a planning application for proposed changes to the County hall complex.

Football Membership Scheme

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Football Association

and the Football League to submit their proposals for a national membership scheme for football to him; when he expects to have concluded his consideration of the proposals; and when he estimates that the scheme will be fully implemented.

Mr. Moynihan: Subject to parliamentary approval of the Football Spectators Bill, we hope that a body set up by the Football Association and the Football League will be appointed as the Football Membership Authority to run the national membership scheme. To that end they are already engaged in detailed consideration of the proposed scheme through the establishment of a joint working party.

Provided that the Bill achieves the Royal Assent by the summer recess the football authorities are aiming to submit a draft scheme by 31 August and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will then consider the draft in the autumn. It is expected that the scheme will be implemented in full in spring 1990 subject to the appropriate technology being in place.

Middlesex Guildhall Collection

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the London borough of Harrow was chosen to accept responsibility for the Middlesex Guildhall colection; and what other London boroughs were approached.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The London borough of Harrow, whose boundaries formerly fell within the area of Middlesex county council, expressed an interest in assuming responsibility for the Middlesex Guildhall collection.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of the proposed agreement between the London residuary body and the London borough of Harrow in respect of the Middlesex Guildhall collection; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Discussions continue about the terms of a possible agreement.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has regarding the cost of the restoration work needing to be made on the George III tapestry currently within the Middlesex Guildhall collection; who will be responsible for the restoration costs; where the tapestry is to be located; and under whose responsibility.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The scale of costs for this restoration has not been established as yet. The London residuary body proposes to meet the restoration costs. On restoration it is planned the tapestry will be placed in the Middlesex Guildhall building. Negotiations on the long term responsibility and care of the tapestry are continuing.

Palace of Westminster (Dust)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider his decision not to analyse high levels of dust in office accommodation at the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* I have nothing to add to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member on 7 March 1989 at column *458*.

Cryptosporidia

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those water authorities that have tested, or are testing, treated water derived from overground or river sources for the presence of cryptosporidia; and how many tests have revealed the presence of cryptosporidia.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* This information is not held centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) on 5 April 1989 on the presence of cryptosporidia in water supplies in the Oxford area of Thames water authority.

DEFENCE

DROPS

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when production orders for DROPS equipment will be placed.

Mr. Sainsbury: Following demanding and very satisfactory validation and field user trials, I am pleased to announce that at the end of March this year we took up production options within existing contracts, announced by my predecessor on 5 December 1986 at column *840*, with Leyland DAF for the medium mobility vehicle, including the load handling system, and with Paccar UK Ltd. (Foden Trucks Division) for flatracks. Production options on other DROPS equipments will be exercised when trials requirements have been satisfied.

Redundant Submarines

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed the possibility of the United States navy accepting and disposing of redundant submarine reactors on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Sainsbury: This possibility has not been formally discussed with the United States authorities and we have no present plans to do so.

Unit Production Costs

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and why his Department discontinued the practice of publishing unit production costs.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on 14 January 1988 at column *373*.

Arms Sales (Kenya)

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the effects of Lonrho's attempts to frustrate British arms sales to Kenya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: None.

PRIME MINISTER

African Visit

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list all those who accompanied her on her recent visit to Africa; and what their duties were.

The Prime Minister: On my visit to Africa I was accompanied by four officials and 11 support staff. It would not be appropriate to list their names and duties.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister how many of those officials who accompanied her on her recent visit to Africa were press and public relations staff.

The Prime Minister: Two.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what is the provisional estimate of the cost of her recent visit to Africa; and whether all the cost was met from public funds.

The Prime Minister: The provisional estimate of the cost of my recent visit to Africa is £66,000. The cost was met from public funds.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister what was the final cost of her previous trip to Africa, to which she referred in her answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 14 January 1988, *Official Report*, column *353*.

The Prime Minister: The final cost of this visit was £56,542.

Publicity and Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister whether Mr. Bernard Ingham or the Head of the Central Office of Information is the centre of advice on the propriety of Government publicity and advertising as defined in evidence to the Public Accounts Committee following the former's take-over of the latter's previous role as head of profession for Government information officers.

The Prime Minister: Ministers in charge of Departments are responsible for ensuring that Government conventions on publicity and advertising are complied with. The Cabinet Office provides guidance to Departments on the conventions governing propriety. The Cabinet Office also advises the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who adjudicates on these matters in cases of doubt.

HEALTH

Cook-chill Food

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, in view of the complaints received regarding the adequacy of the reheating of cook-chill food on wards at Clayton hospital, Wakefield, and the evidence of breaches of his Department's 1980 guidelines, he will order the immediate suspension of cook-chill catering in this hospital and the reintroduction of conventionally cooked meals.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Since cook-chill catering was introduced at the Clayton hospital on 6 March 14,000 cook-chill meals have been consumed by patients. As at 5 April the district health authority had received a total of five complaints, three of which were from the same patient. Only one related to cook-chill food. All five complaints were passed to the hon. Member who relayed them to the press before seeking an explanation from the health authority. As a result the local press produced biased and inaccurate reports of complaints which in my judgment would certainly not justify the suspension of the successful and popular introduction of cook-chill catering in this hospital.

Hospital Doctors (Negligence Claims)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has for switching liability for negligence claims against hospital doctors from medical defence organisations to health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The rising cost of medical defence subscriptions has been of concern to doctors and to the Government for some years. In 1988 and 1989 the Government are reimbursing two thirds of the cost of defence subscriptions to hospital doctors on whole-time contracts and to doctors on part-time contracts who work wholly for the National Health Service. This is an interim arrangement following a recommendation by the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body in its 1988 report.

On 20 March 1989 we issued a consultative paper proposing that health authorities should take financial responsibility for negligent acts and omissions of their medical and dental staff in the course of their National Health Service employment. We have asked for comments from interested organisations by 5 May.

A copy of the paper has been placed in the Library.

Broseley Hospital

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request the chairman of the Shropshire health authority to respond promptly to the letter from the hon. Member for Ludlow dated 22 March relating to Broseley hospital.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the district general manager for the Shropshire district health authority wrote to my hon. Friend on 3 April in the absence of the chairman on holiday.

Brook Hospital, Woolwich

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he now expects to reach a decision on the proposed removal of the neurosciences unit from the Brook hospital, Woolwich.

Mr. Mellor: Within a matter of days.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage increase, and the national ranking of that percentage increase, in the gross demand waiting list figures between March and September 1988 for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(2) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage increase, and the national ranking of that percentage increase, in the gross demand waiting list figures between September 1987 and September 1988 for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(3) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage increase, and the national ranking of that percentage increase, in the waiting list figures between September 1983 and September 1988 for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(4) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage of people on hospital waiting lists in September 1988 waiting 12 months or more, and the national ranking of that percentage, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(5) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage of people on hospital waiting lists in September 1988 waiting six months or more, and the national ranking of that percentage, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(6) if he will give for each district health authority the number of people on hospital waiting lists in September 1988, and the national ranking of that number, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(7) if he will give for each district health authority the notional time to clear the waiting lists in September 1988, and the national ranking of that notional time, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(8) if he will give for each district health authority the number on the waiting list for day admissions in September 1988, and the national ranking of that number, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(9) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage of people on waiting lists for day admissions in September 1988 waiting six months or more, and the national ranking of that percentage, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties;

(10) if he will give for each district health authority the percentage of people on waiting lists for day admissions in September 1988 waiting 12 months or more, and the national ranking of that percentage, for *(a)* obstetrics and gynaecology, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedics, *(c)* paediatric surgery, *(d)* cardiothoracic surgery, *(e)* general surgery, *(f)* ear, nose and throat and *(g)* all specialties.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 22 March 1989]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library. Reasons for the variations between districts in the number of cases on individual waiting lists include the size and age structure of the population and the extent of local development of specialised services. Not all health authorities have these specialties.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Restrictive Trade Practices

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he anticipates announcing his conclusions of the review into restrictive trade practices policy.

Mr. Maude: Within the next few months.

"Home Sweet Home"

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the impact of the publication, "Home Sweet Home," a guide for first-time buyers, issued by the Office of Fair Trading; and whether he has any plans to make its availability more widely known through an advertising campaign in the national and regional press, and in magazines and journals specifically catering for the first-time buyer age-group.

Mr. Forth: I am advised that this publication has been well received by the public. One million copies of the edition applicable to England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 200,000 copies of the edition applicable to Scotland have been distributed.

The question of publicity for the leaflet is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading. I will ask him to write to my hon. Friend.

Wireless Telegraphy Acts

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what additional measures are being taken to reduce the burden of licensing requirements under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts.

Mr. Atkins: My Department is today laying a set of regulations under section 1 of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 which will further reduce licensing requirements, in line with intentions expressed in the White Paper "Releasing Enterprise" (Cm 512), published in November 1988.

The regulations are designed to exempt certain low-power radio devices for industrial and non-industrial use from licensing requirements: induction, telemetry and telecommand, speech communications, field disturbance, alarm and general purpose devices. This covers a wide range of devices, including certain industrial remote control equipment and some security and burglar alarms, to domestic items such as garage door openers, and children's toys.

This is a far-reaching piece of deregulation, affecting industrial, retail and scientific users, and the general public. It is estimated that a further 25,000 licences will no longer be required. For the present the new arrangements will not apply in the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, but free, once-and-for-all licences will be issued for devices which would otherwise be exempt.

The regulations are due to come into force on 1 May 1989.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* My Department's expenditure on consultants employed to improve the efficiency of the Department in the financial year 1988-89 is estimated to be £6,749,000, of which £3,612,000 is for computer consultancy contracts excluding hardware and software purchases. Expenditure on management consultants is not recorded separately from other consultancy spend. The following is the list of management or computer consultancy contracts awarded for the 1988 calendar year:

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
London Transport International	South American Transport Study
Data Dictionary Systems Ltd.	Draft ISO Standard Study
Organisation and Systems Innovations Ltd.	Export System Application Study
Logica (UK) Ltd.	Vanguard Studies
ISC Electronic Systems Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Plessey Co.	Cellular Radio Study
Coopers Lybrand and Associates	Single Advisory Service
Ernst and Whinney Ltd.	Single Advisory Service
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Foreign Inward Investment Agencies Review
ICL (UK) Ltd.	Mail Network Project
Policy Studies Institute	Britain in 2010
Chesking Consultants	VLSI Computer Aided Design Study
Wellace Ltd.	Civil Spectrum Review
City and Corperate Counsel Ltd.	Japan '88 Campaign Support
KMPG Peat Marwick McLintock	Shipbuilding Study
Organisation and System Innovations Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Arthur D Little Ltd.	Vanguard Study
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Vanguard Study
Langton Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Hoskyns Group Ltd.	Vanguard Study
P A Consulting Group	Vanguard Study
CAP Industry Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Scicon Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Price Waterhouse and Co.	Vanguard Study
Marketing Solutions Ltd.	OSI Studies
Pinnacle Ltd.	OSI Studies
Technology Appraisals	OSI Studies
Coopers Lybrand and Associates	Vanguard—VADS Study
Baker and Smith Ltd.	Vanguard—Development Programme
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd.	Software Engineering Projects
J Westgate (Consultants) Ltd.	OSI Standardisation
Logica (UK) Ltd.	OSI Standardisation
CAP Industry Ltd.	OSI Standardisation

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Taylor Hitec Ltd.	FAMOS Secretariat
British Computer Society	Alvey Software Engineering Evaluation
Touche Ross and Co.	MVDS Feasibility Study
Metra Consulting Group Ltd.	Exports Publication
Level—7 Ltd.	OSI User Instructions
National Computing Centre Ltd.	Software Industry Research
CAP Industry Ltd.	Standards Unit Survey
Benchmark Research Ltd.	System Integration in the Manufacturing Environment
Economic and Social Research Council	Science and Technology Indications
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	OSI Methodology Development
Pieda Ltd.	Inward Investment Study
National Computing Centre Ltd.	OSI Secretariat
ERA Technology Ltd.	Database Feasibility Study
Resource International PLC	Saudi Arabian Consultancy Project
PA Computers and Telecommunications Ltd.	Fifth Channel Study
The Welding Institute	Eureka Project
P-E Computer Services Ltd.	Switched Network Project
CAP Industry Ltd.	EDI Standards Study
PA Technology	Biotechnology Equipment Study
National Computing Centre Ltd.	Focus Suppliers Committee
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Single European Market
Baxter Eadie Ltd.	Letter Post Study
Racal-Decca Ltd.	Aeronautical Public Correspondence Study
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Higher Education and Industry Guide
Lighting Industry Federation Ltd.	Germany Focus Exercise
Communications Studies and Planning Ltd.	Space Directory
Resources Computing Centre Ltd.	Focus Project
Coopers and Lybrand	Technology Feasibility Study
Benchmark Research Ltd.	Engineering Computers Survey
WS Atkins and Partners	Overseas Project Study
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	OSI Opportunity Studies
Racal Research Ltd.	Security Study
Arthur Young	Single Telephone Enquiry Point
PA Consulting Group	Industrial Products and Services Database Study
Coopers and Lybrand	BOTB Export Services Study
Clemdale Associates Ltd.	Policy Planning
British Aerospace Plc	Networks Project
3i Consultants Ltd.	Enterprise Initiative
Ovum Ltd.	Expert Systems Study

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Custom Data Systems Ltd.	Radio Masts System
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants Ltd.	Inner Cities Initiative
P-E Computer Services Ltd.	Insolvency Service Computer Project
Taylor Hitec Ltd.	Management of FAMOS initiative
Andrew Irving Associates	Business and Education Campaign
Wang (UK) Ltd.	Datalink Project
Institute of Logistics and Distribution Management	Rapid Transit Freight Study
Logica (UK) Ltd.	EDI Study
P-E Computer Services Ltd.	Company Information Study
National Computing Centre Ltd.	IT Standards Study
Coopers and Lybrand	Management Information Study
British Security Industry Association Ltd.	Design Against Crime Project
Commonwealth Science Council	Expert Systems Project
Marketing Solutions Ltd.	OSI Technology Transfer Project
Marketing Solutions Ltd.	OSI Opportunity Study
Segal Quince Wicksteed	Evaluation of Consultancy Initiatives
March Consulting Group	Maintenance Programme
Systems Designers Scientific	Expert Systems Case Studies
Research Associates (Stone) Ltd.	Evaluation of Planning Studies
Leslie Hays and Associates	Regional Enterprise Evaluation
National Education Resources Info Service	Telephone Scheme for Schools
Civil Aviation Authority	Digital Cellular Radio Study
P-E Inbucon Ltd.	Petrochemicals, Oil and Gas Study
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Management Best Practice Awareness
IFS (Conferences) Ltd.	"Inside UK Enterprise" Administration
Technical Audit Ltd.	"Quality Assessed UK Companies" Register
Sherwood Locum Ltd.	Computer Disaster Recovery Study
Segal Quince Wicksteed	Inward Technology Transfer Review
Coopers and Lybrand	Vanguard Sector Development Study
Eosys Ltd.	Vanguard Sector Development Study
Booz Allen and Hamilton Ltd.	Vanguard Development Study
Marketing Solutions Ltd.	Open Systems Project
National Computing Centre Ltd.	Software Standards Study
Logica (UK) Ltd.	Software Standards Study
Brameur Ltd.	Software Standards Study
Organisation and System Innovations Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Booz Allen and Hamilton Ltd.	Vanguard Study
Touche Ross and Co.	Trial Frequency Planning Organisations Study
Securicor Communications Ltd.	Mobile Radio Technology Trials

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Price Waterhouse	Management and Change Study
CMG Information Services Public Sector Ltd.	Computer System Security Analysis
Advanced Robotic Research Ltd.	Advanced Robotic Programme Support
Association for the Advancement of British Biotechnology	Bioprocess Equipment Technoeconomic Evaluation
Information Technology PLC	Computer System Evaluation
Sussex Research Associates Ltd.	Technology Review Study
Tolson and Co.	Promotion in North America
Life Cycle Management Systems	Trade Marks Services
Bikerdike Allen Partners	Fire and Building Regulations Review
CAP Industry Ltd.	OSI Network
Coopers and Lybrand	Satellite Earth Observation Study
Infologistix Ltd.	Central Enquiry Point Study
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Vanguard Studies
Arthur Anderson and Co.	Vanguard Studies
ECOTEC Research and Consulting Ltd.	Pollution Control Equipment Study
Smith Associates Ltd.	Columbus Polar Platform
Quo-Tec Ltd.	New Market Study
Electrical Contractors Association	Single Market Study
International Data Corporation	Inward Investment Targetting
W S Atkins and Partners	Chemical Process Plant Study
British Federation of Printing Machinery and Supplies Ltd.	Electronic Publishing Strategic Market Study
R H Pickering and Associates	Petrochemicals Study
W S Atkins Management Consultants	Metals Study

House of Fraser

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) if he will review the decision on the publication of the report on the acquisition of House of Fraser plc in light of the recent publication of documents relating to the acquisition; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he now expects to receive the report of the serious fraud squad on the material contained in the report on the acquisition of House of Fraser plc; and if he will make a statement.

(3) if he will invite the inspectors who produced the report into the acquisition of House of Fraser plc to review their powers under section 436 of the Companies Act 1985, in light of the publication of papers relating to the acquisition since the report was submitted to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: No. My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State has made it abundantly clear that the inspectors' report will be published at the earliest possible moment consistent with the even-handed administration of justice.

Council of Research Ministers

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what initiatives he intends to put to the European Council of Research Ministers in Brussels on 14 March.

Mr. Newton: I have been asked to reply.

I represented Her Majesty's Government at the meeting of the Community's Council of Ministers (Research) in Brussels on 14 March.

The Council adopted the following four programmes within the overall provisions of the Community's 1987 to 1991 framework programme for research and development:

JOULE, a programme of research in the field of non-nuclear energy and efficient use of energy supplies, with Community funding of 122 million ecu (£79 million) over 39 months.

BRITE/EURAM, a programme of research in the field of manufacturing technologies, advanced materials, and aeronautics with Community funding of 499 million ecu (£324 million) over three years.

The large facilities programme to provide wider access by European researchers to large-scale European scientific facilities and to contribute to the cost of

enhancements to those facilities. The programme will provide Community funding of 30 million ecu (£20 million) over four years.

A third five-year programme (1989 to 1993) of research and technological development for the European Atomic Energy Community in the field of decommissioning of nuclear installations, including the treatment of specific wastes, and decontamination and dismantling techniques. The programme will provide Community funding of 31·5 million ecu (£20·5 million).

The Council also adopted common positions on the following six Community programmes:

DOSES, a programme over four years with Community funding of 4 million ecu (£2·5 million) in the field of research into statistical expert systems:

FLAIR, a programme with Community funding of 25 million ecu (£16 million) over five years in the field of food linked agro-industrial research;

EUROTRA, an extension of the programme to develop a machine translation system of advanced design, with Community funding of 7 million ecu (£4·2 million);

MAST, a programme of research in basic and applied marine science. The programme is to run over a three-year period with Community funding of 50 million ecu (£32·5 million);

MONITOR, a programme on forecasting and assessment in science and technology, and evaluation of research and development programmes. The programme will receive Community funding of 22 million ecu (£14 million) over four years;

VALUE, a programme to promote the dissemination and utilisation of results from Community scientific research. The programme will receive Community funding of 38 million ecu (£25 million) over a five-year period.

The Council also held a preliminary exchange of views on the mid-term review of the 1987 to 1991 framework programme for research and development.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to ensure that when the Scottish Grand Committee sits in the Scottish Assembly building, the notice at the public entrance gives details of the time the public can enter; and if he will ensure that the public are given access to wait in the cloakroom area until admitted to the gallery, and that such admission to that area be from 10 am.

Mr. Rifkind: At present members of the public are normally admitted to meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee in the Crown Office building from 10.20 am but are allowed to enter earlier at officials' discretion if the weather is inclement. I have decided that in future members of the public will be admitted to the public gallery from 10 am. The notice at the public entrance will so indicate.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many tree preservation orders have been made in each region in Scotland *(a)* for individual trees and *(b)* for groups of trees or woods, and what area is covered by the latter case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information concerning the numbers of preservation orders or their area is not held by the Scottish Development Department.

Housing

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what debt Scottish Homes has inherited from the Scottish Special Housing Association; and if he will show a breakdown by amount and interest rate.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Homes inherited the total amount of loans outstanding to the Scottish Special Housing Associaion as at 31 March 1989, which totalled £596 million. The breakdown by amounts and interest rates are as follows:

Interest rate	*Loan outstanding*
2·500	2,530,826·84
3·000	12,951,131·11
3·125	511,402·14
3·750	2,555,008·26
4·000	3,939,574·13
4·250	13,019,915·31
5·000	2,541,755·50
5·125	1,683,873·58
5·375	1,704,769·61
5·500	9,966,733·13
5·625	4,120,670·15
5·750	7,232,054·02
6·000	27,287,559·17
6·250	1,407,179·75
6·375	1,214,675·39
7·375	10,412,689·91
7·750	6,536,406·52
8·125	3,735,625·90
8·250	7,936,655·77
8·875	4,934,512·12
9·000	6,727,927·57
9·125	11,860,970·95
9·250	22,707,207·68
9·375	4,629,167·17
9·500	23,990,296·06
9·750	15,994,104·90
9·875	2,899,460·35
10·375	965,176·17
10·500	28,446,130·63
10·625	5,494,428·86
10·750	24,344,310·20
11·000	29,741,832·19
11·125	15,256,405·17
11·500	7,535,106·16
12·375	7,645,554·56
13·000	19,053,159·71
13·125	20,771,610·44
13·500	28,404,386·56
13·750	25,026,871·38
13·875	23,669,144·80
14·000	23,443,179·14
14·125	7,724,149·82
14·250	67,806,283·50
14·375	17,118,260·15
14·625	8,353,939·69
15·875	6,539,888·91
16·375	13,926,504·30
	596,298,475·33

Bugging

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will seek a report from the chief constable of Strathclyde region on what steps he intends to take to investigate the bugging of various residences and establishments in Helensburgh by David Coughlin.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages (Midlands)

Mrs Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the excuses given by employers in the midlands who were discovered in 1988 to have been paying wages below the statutory minimum.

Mr. Nicholls: Specific information could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but such underpayment as occurs can often be attributed to ignorance or inadvertance.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the names and addresses of those employers in the midlands who on check in 1988 were found to be paying wages below the statutory minimum.

Mr. Nicholls: No. The inspectorate treats all its inquiries and investigations as confidential and the results are disclosed only to those involved.

Employment Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of trainees on employment training *(a)* in London and *(b)* nationally have been placed with employers for 60 per cent. of their time for work experience.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested on the percentage of trainees placed with employers for 60 per cent. of their time for work experience is not available. It is estimated that at any one time 17 per cent. of trainees in London and 21 per cent. nationally are on placements with employers.

Wages Councils

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers' organisations have requested the abolition of the wages councils; and if he will list them.

Mr. Nicholls: It is not the Department's practice to reveal the content of submissions made by individual organisations. The employer organisations which responded to the Government's consultation document on wages councils were listed in the reply given to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 23 March, *Official Report*, column *798*. As that reply shows, 37 out of 68 employer organisations supported abolition.

Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the average total gross payments per week to workers in the national dock labour scheme and the average total gross payments per week for all employees in Great Britain.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* The average total gross payments per week to workers in the dock labour scheme was £341·83 in March 1989. The latest available estimate of average total gross payments per week for all full time, adult employees in Great Britain was £234 in January 1989.

Vocational Training

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the total amount spent on vocational education and training *(a)* from public expenditure, *(b)* by employers and *(c)* by the armed services in each year since 1970 in cash and at 1988 prices.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The Manpower Services Commission was established in 1974 and expenditure figures can be provided only from the financial year 1974-75 onwards.

The total expenditure on vocational education and training by the Manpower Services Commission and the Training Commission was as follows:

	Cash value £ *million*	*At 1988 prices* £ *million*
1974-75	96·4	318·5
1975-76	171·7	468·2
1976-77	256·0	598·1
1977-78	292·0	625·3
1978-79	373·6	728·6
1979-80	451·4	735·1
1980-81	560·4	810·4
1981-82	749·1	981·7
1982-83	868·5	1,087·8
1983-84	1,049·5	1,249·0
1984-85	1,144·1	1,283·5
1985-86	1,256·9	1,352·7
1986-87	1,441·4	1,491·5
1987-88	1,613·1	1,613·1

Records of the annual amount spent by employers and by the armed forces on vocational education and training are not kept by the Training Agency. However, a survey carried out for the Training Agency indicated that employers spent a total of some £18 billion on training over the 12 months to the summer of 1987, of which the armed services spent some £2 billion. Comparable figures are not available for earlier years.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cereals

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received any representations about the introduction of a quota scheme for cereals.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government have received representations from trade organisations and individuals both for and against the introduction of a quota scheme or similar compulsory output restrictions for cereals. I am opposed to any such supply control arrangements for cereals, which would tend to ossify production patterns, to penalise efficient enterprises and would be very difficult to administer fairly throughout the European Community.

Milk Quotas

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which member states have proposals, following the agreement by the EEC Council of Agriculture Ministers to measures to comply with the ruling by the European Court of Justice in the Mulder case, to allocate milk quota to producers who were involved in an EEC non-marketing scheme which expired between 1 October 1983 and 31 December 1988.

Mr. Donald Thompson: A Council regulation providing for milk quotas to be made available to former milk producers who took part in the 1977 non-marketing of milk and dairy herd conversion schemes, and who completed their obligations after 31 December 1983, was published in the *Official Journal* on 29 March. It is directly applicable in all member states. Publication of a further Commission regulation, laying down detailed rules on the handling of applications by member states, is expected shortly.

In the United Kingdom application forms will be available from divisional offices of my Ministry and of the Welsh Office Agriculture Department, and from the Agriculture Departments of Scotland and Northern Ireland. The closing date for applications will be 28 June 1989.

Salmon Dealer Licensing Scheme

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he now expects to introduce his salmon dealer licensing scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Work on the scheme is still in hand and I cannot give a firm indication of our proposed timetable at this stage. Nevertheless, the Government recognise the importance of the proposals which will be presented as soon as possible.

Water Pollution

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department is taking to reduce the incidence of river and ground water pollution by silage effluent.

Mr. Ryder: As well as offering 50 per cent. grants for silage effluent facilities, the highest in the European Community, my Department provides free initial advice to farmers on pollution avoidance and is helping the Department of the Environment prepare regulations on minimum standards for silage plant. We fully support tough action by the water authorities over prosecutions of farmers who pollute rivers.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of all herds confirmed as including cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy had *(a)* one animal, *(b)* two animals, *(c)* three animals and *(d)* more than three animals, infected.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Up to 31 March, the percentage of herds with confirmed BSE cases in each category is as follows:

(a) herds with 1 confirmed case—72·2 per cent.
(b) herds with 2 confirmed cases—15·4 per cent.
(c) herds with 3 confirmed cases—6·2 per cent.
(d) herds with more than 3 confirmed cases—6·2 per cent.

Whaling

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the results of the vote in the International Whaling Commission on the United Kingdom resolution against current Japanese research whaling.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The United Kingdom was seriously concerned about the current Japanese feasibility programme of whaling for scientific purposes. We therefore proposed a resolution in the International Whaling Commission calling on Japan to refrain from carrying out its programme until the various doubts had been resolved. I am pleased that the resolution has been supported by 16 of the 32 members of the International Whaling Commission eligible to vote, with only four votes against and four abstentions. We however required 17 votes for the resolution to take effect. Nevertheless the result very clearly demonstrates the unease and concern of the large majority of the International Whaling Commission members who chose to vote about whether the Japanese programme is fully justified and has fully satisfied criteria for sound scientific research. We consider that Japan should pay firm heed to this concern and will continue to work through the International Whaling Commission to this end.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 April 1989

CIVIL SERVICE

Pensions (Retail Prices Index Error)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met or had correspondence with each of the Civil Service pension organisations that are awaiting the payable order awarded to them following an error in the calculation of the retail prices index about this matter; and when he expects Parliament to approve payment of the supplementary estimate for funds for those three organisations.

Mr. Luce: My Department wrote to each of the organisations awaiting awards from the RPI error funds on 16 March enclosing a payable order for the sums due.

HOME DEPARTMENT

DNA Testing

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the introduction of DNA testing for the purposes of the immigration rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have received various representations from Members of Parliament and others concerning the possible introduction of DNA testing into the entry clearance process, and the operation of the immigration rules in relation to reapplicants previously refused entry clearance. We hope to make an announcement on both these matters in the relatively near future.

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last visited Wandsworth prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend visited Her Majesty's prison Wandsworth on Monday 6 February 1989.

Press Council

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chairman of the Press Council; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Hurd: I last met the chairman of the Press Council on 18 January. We discussed the chairman's recent appointment to the council, the forthcoming review of the council's role and procedures and the issues raised by the Right of Reply Bill and the Protection of Privacy Bill.

Prison Quarters

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison quarters remain unusable.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Only a few prison quarters which are structurally unsound or substandard are considered to be unusable. National figures are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but the number of such properties on the Isle of Wight is seven.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received on the electronic tagging of offenders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: In the last 12 months 26 letters have been received, including nine from Members of Parliament, together with a number of representations from interested individuals and organisations. One of the objectives of the forthcoming field trials involving the monitoring of defendants remanded on bail will be to enable decisions to be reached on the use of electronic monitoring in respect of convicted offenders.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he has had with interested parties regarding the introduction of electronic tagging; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have consulted the magistrates courts, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service in the three areas where we propose to conduct field trials of electronic monitoring. We shall shortly be arranging meetings at which the procedures envisaged can be explained to local legal practitioners and others with an interest. A meeting has also been arranged with representatives of the probation services in the areas concerned.

Video Recordings

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions have been brought and how many convictions obtained for hiring or selling video recordings to young people below the relevant minimim age classification in the last 12 months;

(2) how many prosecutions for hiring or selling unclassified video recordings have been brought *(a)* in the London borough of Newham *(b)* in the City of Westminster and *(c)* in England by trading standards officers in the last three months.

Mr. Renton: The latest information available centrally, which may be incomplete, relates to 1987. This indicates that in England and Wales there were six prosecutions under sections 9 and 10 of the Video Recordings Act 1984 for hiring or selling video recordings containing unclassified video works and two prosecutions under section 11 for hiring or selling video recordings to persons below the minimum age specified on the classification certificates issued in respect of works contained in the recordings. None of these prosecutions was in the City of Westminster; one under section 10 was in the London borough of Newham. The extension of enforcement powers to trading standards officers from September 1988 will result in far more prosecutions. I understand in several hundred cases already the British Board of Film Classification has been asked to certify (as evidence for use in criminal proceedings) whether works have been classified and, if so, under what classification.

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has received representations from the British Videogram Association about delays in classifying video titles by the British Board of Film Classification; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when his officials last met representatives of the British Board of Film Classification to discuss delays on classifying video titles.

Mr. Renton: I am not aware of any recent representations from the British Videogram Association about delays at the British Board of Film Classification in classifying video works. Home Office officials are in regular contact with the board about the administration of the Video Recordings Act 1984 and discussed with its officials on 22 March the length of time taken to issue classification certificates for video works.

Police (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has for each police force of the number of officers of chief superintendent level and above, and as to the number of black and Asian officers holding such posts.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is set out in the table. There are no black or Asian officers in these ranks.

Police forces in England and Wales

31 December 1988	*Chief Constable*[1]	*Deputy Chief Constable*[2]	*Assistant Chief Constable*[3]	*Chief Superintendent*
Avon and Somerset	1	1	3	14
Bedfordshire	1	1	1	5
Cambridgeshire	1	1	1	5
Cheshire	1	1	2	8
City of London	1	1	1	6
Cleveland	1	1	2	7
Cumbria	1	1	1	7
Derbyshire	1	1	2	9
Devon and Cornwall	1	1	3	13
Dorset	1	1	1	6
Durham	1	1	2	7
Dyfed-Powys	1	1	1	7
Essex	1	1	3	11
Gloucestershire	1	1	1	6
Greater Manchester	1	1	6	27
Gwent	1	1	1	5
Hampshire	1	1	3	10
Hertfordshire	1	1	2	9
Humberside	1	1	2	8
Kent	1	1	4	10
Lancashire	1	1	3	13
Leicestershire	1	1	2	7
Lincolnshire	1	1	1	5
Merseyside	1	1	4	19
Metropolitan	6	16	38	158
Norfolk	1	1	1	7
Northamptonshire	1	1	1	6
Northumbria	1	1	3	13
North Wales	1	1	1	7
North Yorkshire	1	1	1	7
Nottinghamshire	1	1	2	8
South Wales	1	1	3	14
South Yorkshire	1	1	3	11
Staffordshire	1	1	1	11
Suffolk	1	1	1	6
Surrey	1	1	2	7
Sussex	1	1	3	12
Thames Valley	1	1	3	12
Warwickshire	1	1	1	5
West Mercia	1	1	2	10
West Midlands	1	1	5	21
West Yorkshire	1	1	4	20
Wiltshire	1	1	1	6
TOTAL	48	58	128	565

[1] Includes ranks of assistant commissioner and above in the Metropolitan police and commissioner in the City of London police.
[2] Includes deputy assistant commissioner in the Metropolitan police and assistant commissioner in the City of London police.
[3] Includes commanders in the Metropolitan police and the City of London police.

Child Safety

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to extend local authority access to police records to enable checks to be made on the background of all staff to be employed in areas where they have substantial access to children.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Local authorities are already able to seek the disclosure of information from police records about all those seeking employment in posts with substantial access to children.

Surveillance Equipment

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to seek to change the law on the availability of surveillance and counter-surveillance equipment.

Mr. Renton: No, for the reasons given in my response to the debate on electronic surveillance devices initiated by my hon. Friend on 13 March at column 183.

Policing (Lancashire)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the measures to improve policing in Lancashire for 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that among the measures taken in 1988 by the chief constable and his police authority are the civilianisation of 52 posts previously occupied by police officers; successful operations against crime, including one focusing on crimes committed mainly against the elderly by persons posing as officials; a number of schemes to streamline administrative procedures; the trial use of a computerised custody office system; and a number of successful community and crime prevention initiatives.

The chief constable would be pleased to discuss with my hon. Friend these and other examples of effective and efficient policing in Lancashire.

Suicide (Leeds Prison)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the deputy director-general of the prison service of his inquiry into suicide at Leeds prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The report was written as a guide for action within the Department rather than as a public document, but my right hon. Friend announced its main recommendations and his acceptance of them in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 7 March at columns *455-6*.

Independent Television

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to include in legislation a timetable for achieving 25 per cent. independent television production; if he will make it his policy that once this target is reached he will seek to increase it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have sought and received a commitment from the BBC and IBA that, subject to satisfaction in cost and quality, 25 per cent. of original television output will be commissioned from independent producers by the end of 1992. There are no plans to include that target in legislation, but we attach great importance to its achievement and are in close touch with broadcasters and independent producers to monitor progress.

Our White Paper on broadcasting proposes that from 1993 there should be a statutory requirement on all Channel 3 and 5 licensees for a minimum of 25 per cent. of original programming to come from independent producers. We will discuss with the BBC in due course the appropriate level of their commissioning from independent producers from 1993.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the established staff for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; by how many the actual staff is below that figure; and what steps he is taking to reduce the delays of the board in dealing with claims.

Mr. John Patten: On 3 April 1989, the board had 312·5 whole-time equivalent staff (7·5 whole-time equivalent staff below its complement of 320), including 31 casual staff engaged as part of the gradual relocation of about 100 posts from London to Glasgow. We have increased staff by about 100 since 1987 to meet the increase in workload, and with the board we are reviewing administrative procedures with the aim of reducing the time taken to resolve claims.

Amusement Arcade Burnings

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the identity of the victims of the recent amusement arcade burnings.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metroplis that the persons who died were Mr. Kandiahkanapathy Vinayagamoorthy, who was born on 2 June 1960 in Sri Lanka and Mr. Ambikaipahan Anapayan, born on 13 February 1968 in Sri Lanka. The injured persons were Miss Deborah Bernadine Alvares, born 20 August 1962 in east Africa, and Mr. Yurev Alejandro Gomez, born 25 November 1965 in Chile.

Gambling (Young People)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the new evidence on the harmful effects on children and young people of the addiction to fruit machines and similar gambling practices and on Her Majesty's Government support for local authorities which are trying to control these activities.

Mr. John Patten: The results of the Home Office research study "Amusement Machines: Dependency and Delinquency" published last year showed that very few young people are at risk of becoming dependent on amusement machines and there is no clear evidence of any association between the playing of machines and delinquency. We have received no reliable new evidence to contradict these results or to throw doubt on the conclusion we reached that further legislative controls are therefore not justified.

The Government fully support local authorities in their efforts to ensure the proper control of amusement-with-prizes machines. We issued a circular to all local authorities on 18 November to remind them of the considerable powers already available to them under the Gaming Act 1968 to regulate such machines in their areas. We have also consulted the local authority and trade associations on draft model byelaws controlling, among other things, the opening hours of amusement arcades and it is expected that model byelaws will be available for adoption in the summer.

Mrs. Nighat Nisar

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mrs. Nighat Nisar, Ref A 412514 and IMM/90791, applied to the British post in Islamabad for permission to join her husband in the United Kingdom; on what date her application was referred to him; and when he expects to take a decision on this application.

Mr. Renton: Mrs. Nisar applied for entry clearance on 20 July 1987. She and the sponsor, Mr. Ahmed, were interviewed in Islamabad on 28 October 1987 and the application was referred to the Home Office on 16 December 1987. It was found necessary to interview Mr. Ahmed further in order to establish where he was domiciled at the time the marriage was celebrated; this was undertaken by the entry clearance officer in Islamabad on 2 June 1988. Mrs. Nisar's application was refused on 14 March 1989 because her husband did not meet the domicile requirements for the marriage to be valid under English law. Mrs. Nisar has been informed of this decision and her right of appeal to the independent appellate authorities. This was not a straightforward case, but I regret the considerable delay in deciding it.

Rape Victims

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on measures to protect the anonymity of rape victims in civil cases.

Mr. John Patten: Under section 4 of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976, as amended by section 158 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, it is an offence to publish or broadcast the name or address or a still or moving picture of a woman after an allegation has been made that she has been the victim of a rape offence, if that is likely to lead members of the public to identify her as an alleged victim of such an offence. The prohibition applies during the whole of the woman's lifetime, unless the courts make a specific direction to the contrary, and it applies whether proceedings follow or not; if they do, it applies in relation to civil as well as criminal proceedings. It is, however, a defence that the woman has given written consent for the matter to appear, provided that no person has unreasonably interfered with her peace or comfort with intent to obtain the consent. Prosecutions require the consent of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. The maximum penalty is a £2,000 fine.

ENERGY

Roof Insulation

13. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the amount of energy that would be saved by the implementation across the United Kingdom housing stock of the recommendation of the Building Research Establishment on the thickness of roof insulation.

Mr. Peter Morris: Where loft insulation is one inch or less, installation of an extra four inches could lead to an annual energy saving of some 0·73 million tonnes oil equivalent. However, householders are likely to want to opt at least in part for greater warmth rather than simply saving energy.

45. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the tonnes of oil or coal equivalent that would be saved if 10 inches thickness of roof insulation were installed in every domestic property in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Morrison: It is estimated that installation of 10 inches of insulation in all domestic buildings with accessible lofts would lead to a potential annual saving of 2·6 million tonnes of coal equivalent (1·5 million tonnes of oil equivalent). However, insulation to that thickness would not be cost effective.

CEGB

14. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board; and what matters were discussed.

27. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the Central Electricity Generating Board; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet the chairman of the CEGB to discuss matters of common interest.

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

18. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will invite the right hon. Member who was the Secretary of State for Energy when the Government gave planning permission for the thermal oxide reprocessing plant to open on its completion in 1992.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his interesting suggestion which I have passed on to the chairman of British Nuclear fuels plc.

French Energy Minister

19. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met his French opposite number; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met his French opposite number very briefly in December 1987 to discuss the fast reactor.

AGR Stations

20. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the dates of full commissioning to their design capacity of the advanced gas-cooled reactor stations at Dungeness B, Hartlepool and Heysham I and II.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is an operational matter for the CEGB. The board informs me that both reactor units at Heysham II have operated at their design capacity and the station is expected to be commissioned in 1989. The reactor units at Hartlepool, Heysham I and Dungeness B have operated at substantial load but have not reached their design rating. The CEGB intends to declare interim capacities for these units during 1989.

West Burton Power Station

21. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the date when the

Central Electricity Generating Board, or either of its successor generating companies, will submit a planning application for the proposed West Burton 1800 MW coal-fired power station.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The CEGB submitted an application last year for my right hon. Friend's consent to construct a new electricity generating station at West Burton.

My right hon. Friend is awaiting confirmation from the Nottinghamshire county council, the Bassetlaw district council and the CEGB that agreement has been reached between them on certain outstanding matters before proceeding with his consideration of the application. These matters relate to access to the proposed site during construction of the station.

Energy Prices

22. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received concerning the effects of increased energy prices on pensioners and the low paid.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have received a number of representations, amounting to 38 cases raised by hon. Members during the last three years and in the same period an average of one letter a week from the general public. However, over the past five years the fuel bills of pensioners and the low paid have fallen in real terms by 15 per cent., while pensions have risen in line with the retail price index.

Power Station Capacity

23. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the size of the ordering programme for new power station capacity to the year 2000.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In evidence to the Hinkley Point C public inquiry the Central Electricity Generating Board estimated that an additional 15·5 GW of generating capacity would be required by the year 2000.

Small Mines

24. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to amend the legislation governing the operation of small mines.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Such plans will form part of our privatisation programme in the next Parliament.

European Market (Competition)

25. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement concerning the possible effects of the European Commission initiative announced on 9 March demanding greater competition in Europe's electricity and coal markets.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The European Commission has publicised an intention to make proposals on these matters. However, none has yet been received by Her Majesty's Government. We would welcome effective moves towards greater competition in the Community's coal and electricity markets.

Standing Charges

26. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the revenue total in 1989-90 according to British Gas and to the 12 area boards and two Scottish boards in the electricity supply industry from domestic standing charges.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Forward estimates of revenue from standing charges are not available to my Department. They are matters for British Gas plc and the electricity boards.

Electricity Privatisation

28. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals are being considered for an employee share ownership scheme following privatisation of the electricity industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: We shall make sure that special terms are available to enable employees to purchase shares in their companies. However, no decision on the type of offers that will be made to employees has yet been taken.

39. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the direct cost of privatisation to the two Scottish boards and the 12 area boards in the electricity supply industry in 1989-90 when compiled on the same basis as the £76 million proposed to be shown in the accounts of the Central Electricity Generating Board and its successor companies.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland is responsible for the two Scottish boards. The costs of preparing for the forthcoming privatisation, incurred by any of the 12 area boards or the two Scottish boards, are the responsibility of the boards themselves.

44. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals are being considered for customer rights following privatisation of the electricity industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Electricity Bill currently before Parliament provides customers with a whole range of new rights which they have never had before, including a new system of guaranteed standards of performance with automatic compensation for failures to meet these standards, special consideration for the elderly and disabled and help for those who have difficulty in paying bills. The Director General of Electricity Supply will have the key role of protecting the consumers' interests, and he will be advised on all issues affecting the consumer by the new regional consumer committees.

48. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the impact of privatisation on the number of employees employed by the electricity supply industry for 1988, 1990 and 1992.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Manning levels after privatisation will be a matter for the industry, as is the case now.

Energy Conservation

29. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about how much an average householder's fuel bills could be reduced if tried and tested measures of energy conservation were adopted.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The scope for improvements in energy efficiency in individual dwellings varies considerably, depending on such factors as existing installations and the lifestyle of the occupants. However, over the country as a whole the scope for cost-effective energy efficiency improvements in the domestic sector estimated to allow savings of at least 20 per cent.

Electricity Supply Industry

30. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next proposes to meet the electricity supply industry trade unions; and whether he will discuss the future of Marchwood Engineering Laboratories and the other research and development activities of the boards.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the electricity supply industry trade unions from time to time. The future of Marchwood Engineering Laboratories is a matter for the CEGB and its successor companies, which have said that the decision to vacate this site would have been the same, whichever successor company Marchwood had been allocated to. I have been assured that this will in no way prejudice essential research into nuclear safety matters, which will either be completed or transferred elsewhere before the site is closed.

Fuel Prices

31. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about the impact on the average pensioner of fuel price increases over the last five years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Between 1983 and 1988 the fuel bills both of pensioners and of the low paid are estimated to have fallen by 15 per cent. in real terms. Over the same period, the state pension has risen in line with the retail price index.

Low-energy Domestic Appliances

32. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the 12 area board chairmen and the chairman of the Electricity Council; and whether the future of the research work at the Capenhurst laboratory into low energy domestic appliances was discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the area boards and the chairman of the Electricity Council regularly to discuss a range of issues of mutual interest. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy, Baroness Hooper, has recently visited the Capenhurst laboratory and we appreciate the value of the work carried out there.

Magnox Power Stations

33. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the cost of decommissioning the Magnox nuclear power stations *(a)* in the shortest technologically feasible time and *(b)* by the lowest book-keeping cost technique.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Decommissioning Magnox nuclear power stations is an operational matter for the CEGB. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member about the estimates of cost.

Wind Parks

34. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what would be the estimated size of a wind park with an output capacity of 1200 MW; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Michael Spicer: It is estimated that the land area required for a wind farm with an installed capacity of 1200 MW might be between 110 and 140 square miles although there is still considerable uncertainty about this. It is likely that the machines required would be grouped within smaller wind farms, however. Currently, within my Department's research and development programme on wind energy, we are examining the environmental implications and public acceptability of wind farms. The programme is also examining constraints on the United Kingdom's total wind energy resource that would be imposed by such significant environmental factors as national parks, areas designated as being of outstanding natural beauty and urban land.

Deep-mined Coal (Scotland)

35. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations between British Coal and the South of Scotland electricity board with regard to the future of deep mining coal burn in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland recently announced that British Coal and the South of Scotland Electricity Board have been able to make substantial progress in their negotiations on a new coal deal. Negotiations on the details of an agreement, including the question of price, are however continuing, and are matters for commercial agreement. Pending completion of the detailed negotiations, the South of Scotland Electricity Board has confirmed that it will continue to take supplies from British Coal at the rate of 2 million tonnes per annum and British Coal has confirmed that it will continue to supply at this rate.

Electricity Prices

36. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the impact on the retail prices index of the 1989-90 increases in domestc electricity prices.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The reported average increase of 6·4 per cent. in domestic electricity prices will add one sixth of 1 per cent. to the retail price index.

49. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of where domestic electricity prices in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland will stand in 1989-90 in the league table of such prices in the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development countries.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Electricity Council undertakes an annual survey of electricity prices in 20 countries. This includes domestic electricity prices. On the basis of the latest comparison at 1 July 1988, prices in England and Wales were in the mid-range of domestic prices in the developed world generally. Domestic prices in Scotland are slightly lower than those in England and Wales.

On current projections of international prices, the United Kingdom will remain in the mid-range of prices after the 1989 tariff revision.

55. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the changes in real terms of *(a)* domestic and *(b)* industrial prices between the periods 1974 to 1979 and 1983 to 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In the last five years of Labour Government, between May 1974 and May 1979, domestic electricity prices rose by 9 per cent. and industrial prices by 6 per cent. in real terms.

In the last five years of Conservative Government, between December 1983 and December 1988, domestic electricity prices fell by 9 per cent. and industrial prices by 12 per cent. in real terms.

Offshore Licensing

37. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many applications he has received for the 11th offshore licensing round; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A total of 125 applications were received for the 212 blocks on offer from groups involving 84 companies. In terms of the number of applications received, this was a large response and has been exceeded in only one other licensing round in the past 25 years. I hope to announce awards later this year, probably in the early summer.

British Coal

38. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Alternative Energy

40. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to further encourage the private sector to research sources of alternative energy.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Energy paper 55, published in June 1988, laid out a strategy for encouraging the private sector to become involved in research, development and demonstration activities and eventually take these functions over from Government. The strategy is aimed at ensuring the full and timely commercial development of those renewable technologies shown to be economic, environmentally acceptable and capable of making a contribution to United Kingdom energy supply. It envisages a collaborative programme to the late 1990s involving Government and the manufacturing and energy supply industries to achieve the twin aims of encouraging and promoting the commercialisation of those technologies which are economically attractive, and reducing the uncertainty in the economics of those technologies currently classed as promising but uncertain so that, where possible, they become economic and confidence is created in them.

Already 20 per cent. of the cost of our programme is met by external contributions and we expect this proportion to grow over the next few years as the private sector increases its involvement.

Electricity Bills

41. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the most up-to-date estimate of the percentage of all quarterly electricity bills sent out by estimation without a meter reading in 1980, 1983, 1986 and 1989.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is a matter for the electricity supply industry. I have asked the chairman of the Electricity Council to write to the hon. Member with the information requested in respect of England and Wales. The question of estimated electricity bills in Scotland should be pursued through my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Greenhouse Effect

42. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further action he plans to take in order to increase his departmental contribution to alleviating the greenhouse effect.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department has effective research and development programmes in energy efficiency and renewable energy. There is to be a new campaign to improve energy efficiency within Government and the public sector generally. Electricity privatisation will encourage greater efficiency, will maintain the level of non-fossil generation and will encourage the introduction of new, more efficient and less polluting technology including CHP and combined cycle gas turbines.

Such actions, alongside funding of some of the work of the intergovernmental panel on climate change, are prudent now. When scientific understanding of this complex topic improves we, in conjunction with the wider international community, shall be in a position to undertake further appropriate action.

Energy Sources

43. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made by his Department in exploiting new and renewable sources of energy following the publication in 1988 of "Renewable Energy in the U.K.: The Way Forward".

Mr. Michael Spicer: Since the publication of energy paper 55 in June 1988, 70 projects committing a further £14 million have been initiated as part of our strategy to develop economically attractive and environmentally acceptable renewable sources of energy. These include a number of collaborative projects with industry aimed at encouraging and promoting the commercialisation of those technologies which are economically attractive, and improving technical performance and reducing capital cost for those technologies currently classed as promising but uncertain.

A comprehensive range of promotional literature is now available directed at both lay public audiences to raise general awareness about the prospects for renewable energy, and target professional audiences in particular market sectors to stimulate greater interest in the development of these technologies. Technology transfer plans are now being developed for each technology classed as economically attractive. Over the next year or two, increased effort will be placed on stimulating increased

industrial and commercial involvement in both the R and D programme and the uptake of economic technologies by industrial and commercial concerns.

Redundant Miners

46. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on any proposed changes to the redundant mineworkers' payments scheme.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) earlier today.

Steel Industry (Electricity Costs)

47. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the cost of electricity supplied to the steel industry in England and Wales; what is the EEC average; and what is his latest estimate of the position of England and Wales in the EEC league table of electricity prices supplied to the steel industry.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information is not available in the detail sought.

The latest Electricity Council survey of electricity prices in 20 countries, including the EEC, indicates that for a typical high voltage industrial customer electricity prices in England and Wales at 1 July 1988 were in the mid-range of prices in the EEC States and the developed world generally.

Current estimates of industrial electricity prices internationally indicate that England and Wales will remain in the mid-range of prices in the EEC after the 1 April tariff revision.

Electricity Demand

50. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by what percentage he expects demands for electricity to increase over the next five years; how this compares with five, 10, 15, and 20 years ago; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: In evidence to the Hinkley Point public inquiry, the CEGB estimated that electricity demand would rise by 2·1 per cent. per annum over the period to 1997, which represents a capacity requirement of 53·6 GW. This figure compares with peak capacity demands in 1984 of 41·9 GW; 1979—42·2 GW; 1974—40·9 GW and 1969—37·8 GW.

European Community Energy Commissioner

51. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the EEC Commissioner for energy; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met Commissioner Cardoso e Cunha on 16 March in London. Discussions covered arrangements for common carriage of electricity, prospects for coal in the United Kingdom, the JET project, the renewables and energy efficiency programmes and the Community directive on gas burn in power stations.

Nuclear Power Stations (Inquiries)

52. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will indicate the criteria used in determining when a public inquiry should be held into an application to build a nuclear power station in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Before reaching his decision on any application for his consent to construct an electricity generating station my right hon. Friend is obliged to hold a public inquiry into the application if a relevant local planning authority has objected to it.

Even if there is no objection from a relevant local planning authority, my right hon. Friend can still call for a public inquiry to be held, if he thinks it appropriate, in the light of other objections received.

Integrated Reactors

53. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the proposed Anglo-American consortium plans for a safe integrated reactor.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Last December the Atomic Energy Authority signed a memorandum of understanding with Rolls-Royce Associates and others to proceed with the design and development of a 300 MW pressurised water reactor known as the safe integrated reactor. The Department is continuing to keep itself informed of developments.

Fossil Fuel Imports

54. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's estimate of the level of fossil fuel imports for the year 1990.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Department does not publish forecasts of fossil fuel imports.

Tidal Barriers

56. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the nation's energy requirements could be met by tidal barriers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 30 January at column *88*.

EC Competition Commissioner

57. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the EEC Commissioner for competition; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have met the EC Commissioner for competition since his appointment.

Renewable Energy

58. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the contribution of renewables to the supply of electricity in Britain by the year 2000 and 2010.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Renewable energy technologies are at an early stage of development and there is great uncertainty about future projections. The most recent estimates of the contribution that could be made by each renewable energy source in the year 2025 have been published in energy paper 55, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. Energy paper 55 estimates that by the year 2025 renewable energy might provide up to the equivalent of around 24 per cent. of supply electricity requirements if the technologies can be proven and applied commercially. No estimates are available for the years 2000 and 2010. It is Government policy to encourage the maximum exploitation of renewable sources of energy wherever they have prospects of being economically viable and environmentally acceptable.

Sellafield (Visitors Centre)

59. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total number of people to have visited the visitors centre at Sellafield.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Nearly 145,000 people have visited the visitors centre at Sellafield since it was opened in June 1988.

Gas Prices

5. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will meet the director general of Ofgas to discuss implementation of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on gas prices.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend is due to meet the Director General of Gas Supply later this month when they will discuss a range of issues of mutual interest.

Tritium

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current stockpile of tritium in the United Kingdom intended for *(a)* fusion energy reseach and *(b)* luminosity use; and what information he has of the amounts of tritium stockpiled and used for non-military purposes in other OECD countries.

Mr. Michael Spicer: There is no stockpile of tritium in the United Kingdom for fusion research. No central records of commercial stocks of tritium are kept, but users have to be registered under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 and are limited in the amount of tritium they are allowed to store on their premises. Their records are subject to regular inspections by the Department of the Environment. I have no information concerning overseas stockpiles of tritium.

Wave Energy

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the date of the start of work on the oscillating water column project on Islay, the date of the completion of civil construction work on that project; and the date of the formal signature by his Department of the papers authorising this work.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department announced the construction of the shoreline wave energy project in Islay on 1 July 1987.

Construction work was started at the beginning of August 1987. The construction and preliminary monitoring phase was successfully completed by the end of March this year. I announced to the House on 23 March that the next phase of the project, to install an air driven power turbine and generator, will now proceed, subject to contract, on the basis of the data acquired so far.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list the number and amounts of payments for work on wave energy in which settlement of the invoice by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority was more than a year after the submission of the invoice; and if he will give the length of the delay in each case;

(2) if he will list those contracts on wave energy research in which final signatures of the papers by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority officials was more than a year after the start of the contract; and if he will give the length of the delay in each instance.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Dungeness B

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what will be the cost, in terms of repairs and lost output, of the minor accident at Dungeness B nuclear power station on 5 February, in which a fuel rod fell into the reactor from the refuelling winch; and for how long the reactor will be out of service.

Mr. Michael Spicer: This is an operational matter for the CEGB and I have asked the chairman to reply diret to the hon. Member.

Coal Imports

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will give the projected figure for the import of coal from the Soviet Union for each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give figures for levels of coal imports from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Coal imports from the USSR since 1984 have been as follows:

	thousand tonnes
1984	11
1985	23
1986	48
1987	89
1988	375

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

In 1988 these imports accounted for 0·3 per cent. of the United Kingdom market for coal. The Government do not make projections of these coal imports.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Medical Research Council

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what sum of the grant-in-aid to the Medical Research Council was specifically directed to the study of the problems of sufferers from myalgic encephalomyelitis in the year 1988-89.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council did not support any research specifically concerning myalgic encephalomyelitis in 1988-89. It did, however, support some work on immune responses to muscles, nerve cells and related structures which may be relevant to the understanding and treatment of this condition. The Medical Research Council is always ready to consider soundly-based scientific proposals for funding of new research, in competition with other applications.

Education Reform Act

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Government intend to issue orders under section 222 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government intend to make an order under section 222 of the Education Reform Act towards the end of May this year.

Marine Engineering

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which universities, polytechnics and colleges of technology had departments of marine engineering in 1968 and in 1988; and how many undergraduate and postgraduate students each department had in 1968 and 1988.

Mr. Jackson: Figures for 1988-89 are not yet available. In 1987-88 there were no postgraduate or first degree students studying marine engineering at polytechnics and colleges in England, although there were 471 sub-degree higher education students; information for 1968 is not available. Published statistics for university students studying mechanical engineering include students studying marine engineering and are shown in the following table. Comprehensive information for individual departments of marine engineering is not readily available.

University students studying mechanical engineering[1]

	1968-89 United Kingdom universities	*1987-88 Great Britain universities*
Full-time		
Postgraduate	698	875
Undergraduate	5,100	5,872
Part-time		
Postgraduate	445	461
Undergraduate	38	20

[1] Includes marine engineering.

School Budgets

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what safeguards exist under the provisions for delegated schools budgets to ensure that governors do not misuse their positions in respect of the placing of contracts with private companies.

Mr. Butcher: Governers are free to place contracts with whichever company offers the service which best meets their school's needs. There are a number of safeguards: the Education (School Government) Regulations prevent individual governors from participating in any decision in which they have a pecuniary interest; governors acting in bad faith over the placing of contracts, whether for gain or otherwise, would not be protected from personal liability; and the use of improper influence in the placing of contracts would also constitute grounds for the withdrawal of delegated responsibility.

Student Unions

Mr Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what arrangements he intends to make for consultation on the forthcoming publication of Government proposals on student unions;

(2) when he intends to publish the Government's proposals arising from its survey of student unions; and what form the publication will take.

Mr. Jackson: My Department has prepared a factual analysis of responses to the survey of student unions announced by my right hon. Friend in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) on 18 April 1988 at column *292*. The analysis will be sent shortly for comment to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics, the Standing Conference of Principals, the Association of Principals of Colleges and the National Union of Students. Thereafter, it will be published. As I indicated in my reply to my hon. Friend the member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on 17 February 1989 at column *415*, the Government will now consider what action might be taken and in due course will consult all those concerned. The form of the consultations will depend on the nature of the conclusions reached.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average rise in salary for each of the last 10 years expressed in relation to the rise in average professional earnings for *(a)* scale 1 primary school teachers, *(b)* the average primary school teacher and *(c)* the heads of primary schools.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information is as follows:

Increases in average full-time primary teachers' salaries [relative to increases in professional earnings]

Annual percentage increases:

	All Primary teachers[1]	*Relative to professional earnings*[2]	*Scale One*[3]	*Relative to professional earnings*[2]	*Heads*	*Relative to professional earnings*[2]
As at 1 April						
1980	36·9	+8·7	36·0	+7·9	40·2	+11·2
1981	9·0	−7·7	9·9	−6·9	6·0	−10·2
1982	7·6	−0·2	8·0	+0·2	7·4	−0·4
1983	5·8	−2·3	6·7	−1·5	3·9	−4·1
1984	5·7	−1·1	6·3	−0·5	5·1	−1·7
1985	7·3	+0·5	7·7	+0·8	6·8	0
1986	7·3	−2·1	7·7	−1·7	7·1	−2·3
1987	16·5	+7·4	—	—	19·9	+10·6
1988	4·2	−6·3	—	—	4·2	−6·3
1989[4]	7·2	—	—	—	7·5	—

[1] Based on the database of teacher records and relevant salary scales. Figures take account of salary drift and incentive allowances, and include the salaries of heads and deputies.

[2] Data is from the average gross earnings of full-time employees for combined occupation groups II, III & V, new earnings survey. Data for 1 April 1989 not yet available.

[3] Scale One teachers were incorporated on to the main scale on October 1987.

[4] Assuming adoption of the recommendations in the second report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average primary schoolteacher's rise in salary for each of the last 10 years in absolute cash terms, in real terms and in relation to the rise in average earnings.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information is as follows:

Increases in average full-time primary teachers' salaries

Annual percentage increase:

	actual[1]	*in real terms*[2]	*in relation to average earnings*[3]
As at 1 April			
1980	36·9	12·5	+11·4
1981	9·0	−2·7	−3·9
1982	7·6	−1·6	−1·6
1983	5·8	1·7	−2·6
1984	5·7	0·5	−2·2
1985	7·3	0·4	0
1986	7·3	4·2	−0·6
1987	16·5	11·7	+8·2
1988	4·2	0·3	−5·1
1989[4]	7·2	—	—

[1] Based on database of teacher records and relevant salary scales. Figures take account of salary drift and incentive allowances, and include the salaries of heads and deputies.

[2] Derived from the retail price index. Data for 1 April 1989 not yet available.

[3] Data is from the average gross earnings of full-time employees (all occupations), new earnings survey. Data for 1 April 1989 not yet available.

[4] Assuming adoption of the recommendations in the second report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what will be the estimated number of people graduating with first degrees in each of the years 1989 to 1995; and what number and what proportion of these totals for each year will need to be recruited into teaching to maintain current pupil to teacher ratios, on the assumption that relative pay and wastage continues at current levels.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* The latest available projections of the total numbers of first degree graduates in Great Britain, including Open university and overseas graduates, were published in the Government's expenditure plans 1989-90 to 1991-92 (Cm. 612). The numbers are shown below.

	Thousands
1989	133
1990	135
1991	136
1992	138

The proportions of these graduates who will need to be recruited into teaching in order to maintain current pupil-teacher ratios will depend in part on the number of recruits from sources other than newly trained graduates.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid (Environmental Factors)

74. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations has he received regarding the attention paid to environmental factors in the aid programme.

Mr. Chris Patten: Environmental aspects of aid, including our commitment to sustainable development and such specific matters as rain forest conservation, are frequently raised by hon. Members and members of the public, as well as by the non-governmental organisations with which we have regular contact.

Forestry

75. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support for forestry is provided under the overseas aid programme.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have committed about £80 million to forestry projects currently underway. We are encouraging aid recipients to direct more of our aid to forestry and we are increasing our support through British charities and for forestry research. We shall also encourage other donors, including multilateral agencies, to give more support to forestry.

British Undergraduate Fellowship Scheme (South Africa)

76. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future plans for the British undergraduate fellowship scheme, South Africa.

Mr. Chris Patten: We are increasing the number of awards available for undergraduate level studies by disadvantaged South Africans, some of whom will continue to be sponsored on courses in this country under the British undergraduate fellowship scheme.

Namibia

77. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria will determine *(a)* which organisations in Namibia may receive development aid and *(b)* the amount of development aid available to Namibia in the run-up to the independence of that country.

Mr. Chris Patten: From 1 April 1990 we expect to provide aid to Namibia on the same basis as to other independent countries. In the meantime, we plan to continue with the existing programme and to make preparations for future activities. In the financial year just ended disbursements on our Namibian programme amounted to about £1·5 million.

Sri Lanka

79. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I visited Sri Lanka in March 1988, when I signed a £20 million reconstruction grant for projects and programmes in the north and east of the island.

Amazonia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support is being given to Dr. John Proctor and the forest regeneration team at Maraca on their work on management of regeneration where rain forests have been destroyed and abandoned and on why rain forests end abruptly and give way to natural savanna.

Mr. Chris Patten: Since 1987 the ODA has committed £80,500 in support of the forest regeneration team which forms part of the Maraca rain forest project organised by the Royal Geographical Society.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies he is financing in the Maraca project or elsewhere to help stem forest destruction by better understanding of the significance of different soil types.

Mr. Chris Patten: The soil studies of the Maraca project, which the ODA helps to fund, are directed to this end by, for example, helping to understand the relationships between the forest and the soil in the critical boundary zone between the rainforest and the savanna woodland. Examples of other ODA activities include the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute's land use work in Belize, Cameroon, Indonesia and Sri Lanka and the ODA-supported land use studies being carried out by the World Wide Fund for Nature in Cameroon and Nigeria.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to monitor the work of the joint Brazil—United Kingdom research project on Maraca Island in the Amazon.

Mr. Chris Patten: The ODA's forestry and environment advisers have been monitoring the project on the basis of regular reports from the research team since April 1987. A review conference took place in Brazil from 3 to 5 April; we expect a report from the Royal Geographical Society.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given, pursuant to the statement on 13 March *Official Report*, column 170, to the report of Mr. Philip Morrice on fire-fighting and related equipment for saving the Amazon forest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: Mr. Morrice reported that the Brazilian authorities needed aircraft, vehicles, patrol boats and telecommunications equipment for fire fighting. I understand that the Brazilian Government are formulating an environmental project, which would cover fire fighting equipment, for consideration by the World Bank. We are discussing with the Brazilians what technical cooperation we could offer in the area of rain forest management and protection.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on *(a)* multilateral and *(b)* bilateral research with Brazil on rainforest problems.

Mr. Chris Patten: Multilateral assistance for research in the Brazilian rain forest has been provided over a number of years through the FAO. Additional proposals are being considered by the International Tropical Timber Organisation and the World Bank. Bilaterally we are currently considering with the Brazilian authorities how and where we might provide further support for their programmes of research on rainforest problems.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the statement of 13 March, *Official Report*, column 172, to what debt-for-nature swop the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), was referring following his visit to Bolivia; and what lessons have been learned.

Mr. Chris Patten: My hon. Friend was referring to the arrangement agreed between the United States charity,

Conservation International, and the Bolivian Government in July 1987. I understand that Conservation International bought $650,000 of Bolivia's commercial bank debt at an 85 per cent. discount. In return for cancellation of the debt the Bolivian Government undertook to implement conservation measures in the Beni Biosphere reserve in northern Bolivia. Although it is too early to judge the outcome of the scheme, we believe that this type of market based debt reduction mechanism can play a modest but useful role in augmenting the resources available for conservation.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what request he has received from the Brazilian Government for *(a)* further technical co-operation and *(b)* co-operation to understand the genetic potential of the Amazon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: During his visit to London in March, the Secretary-General of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked us to suggest further work under the aid programme to help cope with problems of the rainforests. We shall be writing shortly offering assistance in one or more of several areas: genetic resources, social forestry and forestry management and further help for research projects like the Maraca project. The Secretary-General of the Brazilian Ministry of the Interior called on me on 6 April and undertook to send proposals for additional aid projects in this area. We offered help in training and institutional links. I hope to send out professional advisers shortly to discuss the details with the Brazilian authorities.

Ethiopia and Sudan (Aid)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom aid to Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Mr. Chris Patten: We maintain a small technical co-operation programme for Ethiopia, but the bulk of our aid has been in the form of emergency and relief assistance (more than £21 million in 1988 through bilateral and European Community channels).

In the case of Sudan, we have a substantial development aid programme, totalling about £18 million in 1988. We also gave an additional £14·4 million last year, through bilateral and European Community channels, in emergency and relief aid.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Reform

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General how many local prosecutors have issued instructions to their staff not to comment on the Lord Chancellor's Green Papers on legal reform; and whether he has issued such an instruction.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has reminded all members of the Crown prosecution service that, in accordance with standard Civil Service practice, they should not comment publicly on matters of current political controversy. The director has expressed the view that if members of staff wish to make comments on issues raised in the Green Paper, the most appropriate course is to send them to the working party which has been set up under the chairmanship of the deputy director-chief executive to consider the Department's response to the Lord Chancellor's proposals.

All chief crown prosecutors have taken steps to ensure that their staff are aware of the director's views. In addition, one chief Crown prosecutor has informed staff that he will forward their views to the Director of Public Prosecutions, but that they are not otherwise to comment, and one chief Crown prosecutor has issued instructions that his staff should consult him before commenting.

I have not issued any such instruction.

68. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Attorney-General what assessment he has made of the savings to clients in the cost of provision of legal services which would arise from the Lord Chancellor's proposals for the legal profession.

The Attorney-General: The purpose of the Government's provisional proposals is to ensure that the public are provided with the most efficient and effective network of legal services at the most economical price. No assessment has yet been made of the potential savings to clients.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received on the Green Paper proposals on reforming the legal system with respect to their effect on the constitutional relationship between the Government and the judiciary.

The Attorney-General: As at 31 March 1989 a total of 72 such responses had been received.

Land Registry

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the Land Registry to become an agency.

The Attorney-General: The Land Registry's candidacy as an agency has been announced, but no date has yet been fixed for it to assume agency status.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Austin Michell: To ask the Attorney-General how many qualified lawyers are employed by the Crown prosecution service; and how many of these are also qualified as barristers.

The Attorney-General: The latest figures available were given to the hon. Gentleman in my written answer of 16 March 1989. On 31 December 1988 the Crown prosecution service had 1,539 qualified lawyers in its employment, of whom 549 were barristers.

Appeals

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General what is his estimate of the costs to the Crown prosecution service of employing barristers in Crown court appeals against sentence or conviction and committals for sentence in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* Manchester at the latest available year.

The Attorney-General: Barristers employed by the Crown prosecution service do not have rights of audience in the Crown court. The average fees paid to counsel instructed to appear on behalf of the CPS in such cases for the period 1 April to 31 December 1988, the only period for which such information is available were:

	£
Appeals against sentence	72
Appeals against conviction	121
Committals for sentence	74

The information given is for the three London Crown prosecution service areas, whose boundaries extend beyond Greater London. Separate figures for Greater London are not available.

The equivalent figures for Greater Manchester are:

	£
Appeals against sentence	81
Appeals against conviction	132
Committals for sentence	84

Public Defender System

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General if he will arrange for an experiment with a public defender service as recommended by the Hughes royal commission.

The Attorney-General: The experiment recommended by the Royal Commission on legal services in Scotland (Cmnd. 7846) was limited to the Scottish jurisdiction. There are no plans to examine the case for a public defender service in England and Wales.

Serious Fraud Office

64. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the director of the serious fraud office; and what matters were discussed.

The Attorney-General: On Monday 3 April. We discussed matters of departmental interest.

Legal Profession (Complaints)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received on the case for renewing the procedure for making complaints against members of the legal profession, and for dealing with such complaints more effectively.

The Attorney-General: As at 31 March a total of 56 such responses had been received.

Director of Public Prosecutions

66. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what matters were discussed.

The Attorney-General: On 3 April. We discussed matters relating to the Department.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Attorney-General when he next intends to meet the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what matters will be discussed.

The Attorney-General: On 27 April. We intend to discuss a variety of matters of departmental interest.

Incitement to Murder

67. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received regarding the range of penalties available to the court for incitement to murder.

The Attorney-General: None.

"Fighting on Two Fronts"

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received concerning the legal implications of the forthcoming publication of the book entitled, "Fighting on Two Fronts", by Fred Holroyd.

The Attorney-General: None.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General when the appeal on behalf of Mr. Shaukat Ali (Ref: IMM/82875) into the refusal to grant him entry clearance into the United Kingdom for marriage is expected to be heard in the United Kingdom.

The Attorney-General: The appeal papers were received at the immigration appellate authorities headquarters on 25 January 1989. There has been a delay in processing the papers, but they have now been sent to the IAA's office in Leeds. They will be forwarded to the appellant's representatives in the United Kingdom and to the respondent within the next few days. Thereafter, when both parties indicate their readiness to proceed, the appeal will be listed for hearing in Leeds within six weeks.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Relief Agencies

82. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to encourage voluntary giving to relief agencies.

Mr. Lilley: I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to charitable relief agencies. If so, I refer him to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 16 March at columns *300-1*.

Income Tax

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for single persons, one-earner married couples and two-earner married couples above and below pension age the number of tax units in each revenue band of £1,000 to £15,000, £2,500 to £25,000 and in available bands thereafter, together with the forecast revenue from income tax in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Provisional estimates for the 1989-90 tax regime, based on a projection of the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes, are given in the table.

Number of tax units and tax liability by range of total income 1989-90

	Single		Married couple with wife's earnings		Married couple without wife's earnings	
Total income (lower limit) (£ pa)	*Number of units paying tax ('000s)*	*Tax yield (£ millions)*	*Number of units paying tax ('000s)*	*Tax yield (£ millions)*	*Number of units paying tax ('000s)*	*Tax yield (£ millions)*
Tax units under 65						
2,000	140	[1]	—	—	—	—
3,000	790	150	—	—	—	—
4,000	740	300	—	—	60	10
5,000	790	500	10	[1]	150	40
6,000	900	760	20	10	230	90
7,000	910	880	40	10	230	140
8,000	810	950	90	40	210	130
9,000	580	790	80	40	270	230
10,000	1,080	1,910	290	240	590	690
12,000	1,070	2,460	740	970	880	1,540
15,000	700	2,060	1,460	3,130	860	2,240
20,000	350	1,520	1,690	6,200	560	2,310
30,000	90	760	700	5,020	230	2,030
50,000	30	850	180	3,920	100	2,650
Tax units aged 65 and over						
2,000	—	—	—	—	—	—
3,000	120	10	—	—	—	—
4,000	220	50	—	—	—	—
5,000	200	100	10	[1]	40	[1]
6,000	170	130	20	[1]	80	20
7,000	100	100	20	10	120	60
8,000	90	110	30	10	100	70
9,000	50	70	50	30	80	80
10,000	90	160	90	90	90	120
12,000	70	190	90	160	90	190
15,000	70	250	100	260	80	240
20,000	50	250	130	570	50	250
30,000	20	210	60	520	30	300
50,000	20	430	20	490	20	500

[1] Less than £5 million or 5,000.

Schedule E Taxation

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals in salary bands of £20,000 to £30,000, £30,000 to £40,000, £40,000 to £50,000, £50,000 to £6,000, £60,000 to £70,000 and £70,000 upwards are assessed on an accounts basis rather than an accruals basis for schedule E purposes.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I regret that the information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of higher rate taxpayers on Schedule E and their average income.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In 1989-90, about 1·2 million tax units (single people and married couples) whose main source of income is schedule E are liable to higher rate income tax. Their average income is just under £45,000 per annum. This estimate is based on a projection of the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes and is provisional.

London Tax Districts

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many London tax districts are being moved from London under the exit London programme; to which locations they are being moved; and how many staff are involved in each case.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Under the exit London programme, nine London tax districts have already moved and a further 12 are planned to be moved in the next two years. The receiving locations are Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Bristol and Solihull and the approximate numbers of posts involved are 16, 35, 23, 33, 26 and 33 respectively.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount spent by the Inland Revenue in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Inland Revenue in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The amount spent by the Inland Revenue in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts excluding hardware and software purchases was £14·6 million.

The Inland Revenue awarded the following consultancy contracts in 1988:

Arthur Young—Financial Systems
Panacea—Projects Support
ICS (Sales) Ltd—Development of local systems
Compass Ltd—Capacity planning
Coopers & Lybrand—Review of Payroll System
BIS Applied Systems—Contingency Planning
Industrial Society—Assistance with "Team Briefing"
Inforam—BROCS Project Office consultancy
Expertech—Expert System development in Information Centre

F1 Group—Leeds Underwriters unit development
Nicol, Jones & Lomax—Matheson House Planning
Oasis—Customer support activities
The Plan—Matheson House planning
Humphrey & Associates—Review of cost control package
NRPB—VDU radiation survey

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, (1) what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment;

(2) what was the total amount spent by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr Peter Brooke *[holding answers 4 April 1989]:* Total Treasury expenditure in 1988 was some £6·0 million (including some £5·6 million by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency). Figures given include the cost of development studies, which in turn included the cost of associated hardware and software; the latter items are not separately identifiable.

The following management or computer consultancy contracts were awarded by Her Majesty's Treasury in 1988. With the exception of the first 15, all were placed by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency.

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Motivation Strategy Limited	Non-cash incentives.
Moody International Developments	Materials handling.
Peat Marwick McLintock	Assistance with GAD Management Review.
ICL	Computer Software Modification.
Scicon	Computer Software Modification.
B Toyn	Preparation of CUP guidance on planning and progress monitoring in relation to capital expenditure contracts.
M N Pickett	Advice on contracts and contract conditions and preparation of CUP guidance on de-briefing.
M W King	Preparation of CUP guidance on contracting out of departmental purchasing activities.
F Griffiths	Preparation of CUP guidance on the appointment of consultants, engineers and architects.
P A Gee	Preparation of CUP guidance on stock management and computer systems for purchasing and supply.
A N Fegent	Preparation of CUP guidance on stock control.
R Davidson	Production of CUP guidances on quality assurance—principles and terminology; quality systems; project sponsorship—planning and progress monitoring; and project sponsorship—role of project sponsor and relationship with PSA.
D S Collins	Advice on CUP guidance on good buying practice and model conditions of contract.
I Billson	Production of CUP guidance on Performance Measurement.
C D Boylan	Advice on issues relating to the introduction of project sponsorship and "untying" of services from PSA.
Treehouse International Ltd.	Production of Standards and Quality Assurance Procedures.
Treehouse International Ltd.	Infrastructure Library Presentation Design Study.
Treehouse International Ltd.	Information Systems Strategy Guidelines.
Computer System Architects	Provision of a Systems Consultant.
Castel Computers and Systems Telecommunication Ltd.	Verification of Electronically Reproduced Data in Court (VERDICT).
R M O'Connor	IT Standards Catalogue updates and enhancements.
PA Consulting Services Ltd.	Consultancy for Information Systems Evaluation Guides.
Praxis System Plc	Technical Writing and Production of Information Systems Guides.

Firm	Subject of assignment
Proteo Software Inc.	Study on User System Interaction Tools and Techniques.
Rede Group Consultancy and Training	Audit Procedures for Quality Assurance.
Batalas Ltd.	Quality Review
Rede Group Consultancy and Training	Development of Government Quality Management Systems.
Rede Group Consultancy and Training	Development of Audit Procedures for Quality Manual (Phase 2).
Rede Group Consultancy and Training	Study on Quality Standards.
Rede Group Consultancy and Training	ISO 9001 Certification work.
Logica UK Ltd.	Study of the Feasibility of developing a Computer Based Tool to aid the development and exposition of Methods.
Lloyds Register Quality Assurance Ltd.	Comparison of Quality Standards.
Digitex Ltd.	Production of Infrastructure Management Guides.
Logica UK Ltd.	Production of Honeywell Bull Profile.
Logica UK Ltd.	Production of Digital Equipment Company Profile.
SIA Ltd.	Provision of a Systems Consultant.
British Telecom plc	Structured Systems Analysis and Design Method (SSADM) version 4.
Babelease Ltd.	Study of the role of Standards within the Architecture of Infrastructure Management Tools.
Babelease Ltd.	Information Model for Infrastructure Management Support Tools.
Protocol International Ltd.	Technical and Quality Assurance Consultancy.
Yale Data Management Consultants Ltd.	Provision of a Systems Consultant.
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Assistance with Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITTIMM) Network Management Module.
Arthur Andersen & Co.	Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITTIMM) Development Study—Quality Assurance Module.
PA Consulting Services Ltd.	Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITTIMM) Development Study—Software Control and Distribution Module.
Computer Sciences Co. Ltd.	Development of Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology (GITTIMM) Modules.
BIS Applied System Ltd.	IT organisation and Change Management.
PA Consulting Services Ltd.	Government Data Network (GDN) Evaluation Contract.
Amtec Consulting Ltd.	Consultancy for providing a Catalogue of Standard.
EOSYS Ltd.	Consultancy support for the Network Management System (NMS) Project.
BIS Applied Systems Ltd.	SSADM/CRAMM Compatibility Study.
Deuce Computer Systems Ltd.	Support and Production of CRAMM User Guide.
Deuce Computer Systems Ltd.	Production of PEIPS Documents.
Touche Ross	Provision of a System Consultant.
PE Computer Services Ltd.	Provision of a Systems Consultant.
Sergent Baker	Production of Information Systems Guide A4.
Insight International Ltd.	Adaptation and extension of Plexus Software for incorporation into IMSE Demonstrator.

Firm	Subject of assignment
Logica Consultancy Ltd.	Consultant for Documentation of draft Requirements for Infrastructure Management Support Tools.
System Designers Scientific	Public Domain Expert Systems Methodology.
The Instruction Set Ltd.	Common Applications Environment for Government Study.
Electronic Facilities Design Ltd.	Consultancy for the Revision of MEVIOTS—Method for Evaluating the Impact of Office Systems.
Logica Communications and Electronic Systems Ltd.	Development Study into Network Service Access Point (NSAP)—address allocation requirement in Government.
Kermon Associates Ltd.	Government Data Network (GDN) Strategic Planning.
Ultracomp Ltd.	Development of a Service Level Agreement Manager.
Metron Technology Ltd.	Development of a Computer-Based Link between GITTIMM support tool and SSADM support tool.
Martin Ashley Design Associates	Symbol Design for the Advanced Technology Group.
Birmingham Polytechnic	Development Contract for SSADM Conformance Scheme.
CAP Industry Ltd.	Study into the practicalities of harmonising SSADM and MERISE.
Babelease Ltd.	Development Study to produce a generic Model of Expert System Tools.
British Telecom plc	CBX System Design Study.
Stage 3 Solutions Ltd.	Completion of Must 3.
Software Sciences Ltd.	Development of ECLIPSE Software.
International Computers Ltd (ICL)	Computer Aide Support Environment (CASE) phase 2 and Phase 3.

Interest Rates

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what have been the effects on British industry of increased interest rates over the last six months.

Mr. Major: Inflation is the greatest threat to corporate prosperity. British industry will greatly benefit from the Government's firm anti-inflationary policy.

EC Finance

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out Britain's net payment to the European Community for each of the financial years 1980, 1984 and 1988, with the equivalent figures for France and Germany in constant money terms.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The information requested for the United Kingdom is set out below. Equivalent figures for other member states are not available.

Net contributions to the EC budget

(£ million)

Year	Cash Value	At constant 1988 prices[1]
1980	706	1,138
1984	656	802
[2]1988	1,362	1,362

[1] Constant prices have been constructed using the GDP deflator at market prices.
[2] Provisional figure.

PRIME MINISTER

Right of Silence

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister whether the speech made by the Lord Chancellor in Washington, United States of America, to members of the United States legal profession represented Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the right of silence.

The Prime Minister: Government policy continues to be that there is a strong case for substantial changes in the law of England and Wales, but that their precise nature will be decided in the light of the recommendations made by the Home Secretary's working group, whose report is due shortly.

Ministers (House of Lords)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Prime Minister how many government Ministers were members of the House of Lords; and what percentage of the total those ministers represented in *(a)* 1959, *(b)* 1964, *(c)* 1966, *(d)* 1970, *(e)* 1974, *(f)* 1979, *(g)* 1985, *(h)* 1986 and *(i)* 1987.

The Prime Minister: The figures are as follows:

Number of Ministers who were Members of the House of Lords

Year[1]	Total number of Ministers	Ministers in the House of Lords	Percentage
1959	89	19	21
1964	97	24	25
1966	110	20	18
1970	99	17	17
1974	99	21	21
1979	108	16	15
1985	106	20	19

Year[1]	*Total number of Ministers*	*Ministers in the House of Lords*	*Percentage*
1986	107	21	20
1987	107	21	20

[1] Figures relate to 1 January in each year.

Mr. Charles Powell

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the duties and responsibility of Mr. Charles Powell in January 1986 and the position he has since occupied in her office.

The Prime Minister: Mr. Powell was appointed to my office in June 1984 as my private secretary responsible for foreign affairs.

Sir Leon Brittan

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister whether, in the light of Sir Leon Brittan's recent remarks, she will make a further statement on the approval which was given by her office for the leaking of the then Solicitor-General's letter regarding the Westland affair.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the many answers given in statements and in reply to questions on this subject.

Mr. B. Ingham

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will now transfer Mr. B. Ingham from her office.

The Prime Minister: No.

Namibia

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Prime Minister when the Secretary General of the United Nations informed her that his report to the United Nations Security Council on Namibia should be kept confidential.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said during business questions on 6 April 1989, I was not aware that the document in question was confidential until after I referred to it in the House on 4 April 1989.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey (Human Rights)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Turkish authorities about the persistent abuse of human rights in Turkey;

(2) if Her Majesty's Government will urge the Turkish Government to take specific measures against the use of torture in their country, including limiting the length of incommunicado detention, rejecting as evidence in court confessions extracted under torture and reforming the Turkish penal code to allow full freedom of expression and association;

(3) when he will next meet representatives of the Turkish Government to discuss the concern raised by hon. and right hon. Members about the human rights situation in Turkey.

Mrs. Chalker: As I informed the House on 7 and 8 February, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State discussed human rights with the Turkish ambassador on 1 February, as I did the following day. We urged him that his Government should respect and abide by the terms of the international human rights conventions to which Turkey is a party. The Turkish ambassador readily accepted this point, and reaffirmed the determination of his Government to secure further improvements. We also expect Turkey to live up to internationally accepted standards concerning the treatment of prisoners. We have no immediate plans to meet any other representative of the Turkish Government.

Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has raised with the Palestine Liberation Organisation the implications for the peace process in the middle east of the statement in call number 37, broadcast by PLO Central Radio on 31 March, that 5 April was to be a day of violent struggle involving knives, axes and large stones pushed from rooftops and 8 and 9 April were to be devoted to violent militant activities.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The Palestinians are already aware of our view that the intifada should be pursued with the utmost restraint.

European Parliament

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total amount for each of the last four years spent by the European Parliament on Members of the European Parliament's private expenses, broken down into *(a)* secretarial, *(b)* hotel and accommodation, *(c)* travel and *(d)* other expenses; and what was the average amount in each category per Member for the last available year.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is not immediately available. A further reply will be given in due course.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he will make to the European Parliament report containd in document A2-425/88 which calls for the merging of the European Community and Western European Union.

Mrs. Chalker: The report in question is a Committee report which has not been debated at a European Parliament plenary session. There are no plans for such a merger.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to request the Council of Ministers of the European Community to draw to the attention of the European Parliament and its Committees the exclusion of defence matters from their competence.

Mrs. Chalker: No. The European Parliament is an independent Community institution. It is not for the Council to determine what the Parliament may discuss.

Namibia

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the United Kingdom

contribution to the European Community grant to promote democracy in Namibia; and if he will make a statement on how it is to be distributed to the parties concerned in the forthcoming elections.

Mrs. Chalker: We have checked with the European Commission, which is not aware of any such grant. Provision for measures in preparation for Namibian independence was written into the Community's 1989 budget, but no money has yet been allocated to that budget line.

European Community assistance to Namibia to date has consisted of support for non-governmental organisations, food aid and assistance to Namibian refugees.

Sugar

78. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom Government will support proposals to maintain the price of sugar imported under the sugar protocol from African, Caribbean and Pacific states; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The guaranteed price paid to the ACP for imports of sugar under the Lomé sugar protocol is related to the level of support prices for EC-produced sugar. The latter are set annually as part of the CAP price fixing exercise. Discussions are continuing in Brussels on this year's prices.

European Assembly

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent decisions have been taken by the European Economic Community Council about the attendance of ministers and officials of national Governments at meetings and committees of the European Assembly.

Mrs. Chalker: Apart from normal presidency contacts with the European Parliament, representatives of EC Member states may accept invitations to attend and speak at plenary meetings and committees of the European Parliament.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why Mrs. Shahnaz Akhtar, (ref: IMM/96739), who was born on 5 July 1966 was not given a re-entry visa at the British port at Islamabad to return with her husband to the United Kingdom where they have both lived for some years, after their recent holiday in Pakistan; why was she told she would have to apply for entry clearance to the United Kingdom and issued with an entry clearance reference number; why her husband was told to send various documents to the post on his return to the United Kingdom; and if he will compensate Mrs. Akhtar and her husband for the inconvenience and distress caused by their separation as a result of the refusal of the post to assist Mrs. Akhtar to return to the United Kingdom with her husband.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Member when a full report is received from the embassy in Islamabad.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mrs. Rubina Kausar, who was born on 3 March 1968, applied to the British post in Islamabad for entry clearance to join her husband in the United Kingdom; and when a decision will be taken on her application.

Mr. Eggar: The Embassy in Islamabad is unable to trace an application for entry clearance from Mrs. Kauser. If the hon. Member can supply the immigration section file reference number and date of application I will ask the embassy to make a further search.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Abdul Sattar (ref: IMM/77322) applied to the British post in Islamabad for entry clearance to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and when a decision will be taken on his application.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Sattar re-applied for a settlement entry clearance at the embassy in Islamabad on 13 May 1987 and was refused a visa on 9 August 1988. Mr. Sattar appealed against the refusal and the entry clearance officer's explanatory statement was forwarded to the appellate authority on 8 February 1989.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Shaukat Ali, ref: IMM/82875, applied to the British post in Islamabad for entry into the United Kingdom for marriage; when his application was refused; and when the British post sent a statement to the United Kingdom appellate authorities explaining why his application was refused.

Mr. Eggar: Mr. Ali applied for an entry clearance at the embassy in Islamabad on 17 September 1986. His application was refused on 25 April 1988 and the entry clearance officer's explanatory statement was sent to the appellate authorities on 12 January 1989.

Semtex

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has received to requests made to the Czechoslovak Government to ensure that future production of Semtex is given a readily readable signature to assist in the fight against air terrorism.

Mr. Waldegrave: As part of a wider initiative for an international convention on the subject the Czechoslovak Government have expressed willingness to mark Semtex. We are currently discussing with them how to take this forward. Both we and the Czechoslovak Government were represented at an expert meeting under ICAO auspices from 6 to 10 March. The Czechoslovak Government have informed us that they have never knowingly supplied explosives to terrorists and ceased all exports of Semtex in 1982.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent by the Government since 1979 in fighting cases before the European Court of Human Rights up to and including the hearing of 28 March; how much has been paid for the instruction of lawyers; what are the estimated costs in employees' time, travelling and accommodation costs of officials involved in these cases; how much has been paid out in costs or expenses and compensation by the

Government following rulings by the court; and if he will list the sums involved in each case which has reached a ruling stage.

Mrs. Chalker: This information is not immediately available. I will reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Dip

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce an amnesty scheme whereby farmers can return to his Department's offices partly used or unused containers of sheep dip of a lindane base.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so. Farmers wishing to dispose of such chemicals are advised to consult a reputable waste disposal company.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will revise his booklet, "Guidelines for the Disposal of Unwanted Pesticides and Containers on Farms and Holdings", especially in regard to sheep dip.

Mr. MacGregor: In consultation with the working group on the disposal of pesticides, my Department is reviewing and revising the guidance available to farmers. A revised code of practice on pesticide use should be available at the end of the year. Sheep dips are veterinary medicines and are being considered separately. Any changes in the guidance offered to farmers will be reflected in the labelling of sheep dips, in the code of conduct for the safe use of veterinary medicines on farms and in my Department's leaflets and booklets on sheep dipping.

Farm Incomes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales received annual incomes from farming of (i) less than £4,999, (ii) £5,000 to £7,499, (iii) £7,500 to £9,999, (iv) £10,000 to £14,999, (v) £15,000 to £19,999 and (vi) £20,000, respectively, for the latest convenient year.

Mr. Ryder: I regret that this information is not available in the precise form requested. The farm business survey does, however, allow estimates to be made of the proportional breakdown of full-time farm businesses by income band. Information relating to the latest available year, 1987-88, is shown in the table.

Percentage distribution of full-time farm businesses in England and Wales by net farm income:[1] [2]
All types of farm—1987-88

Level of net farm income	*England*	*Wales*[3]
Below £5,000	40	38
£5,000 to £7,499	8	13
£7,500 to £9,999	9	6
£10,000 to £14,999	11	14
£15,000 to £19,999	9	9
£20,000 and above	21	19
All income bands	100	100

[1] Figures are derived from data collected in the farm business survey by universities and agricultural colleges in England and Wales.

[2] Net farm income represents the return to the farmer and spouse for their manual and managerial labour and on tenant type capital in livestock, crops, machinery etc. but excluding land and buildings. It is calculated before the deduction of interest on any farming loans. All farms are treated as rented in the derivation of net farm income and an imputed rental value for owner-occupied land is charged as an expense in the accounts.

[3] Figures for Wales relate to all dairy and livestock farms only.

Tropical Timber

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from local authorities concerning their powers to accept other than the lowest tenders for sea defence schemes constructed of tropical timber, in order that the timber can be obtained from sources that can be guaranteed to be sustainable and non-destructive of tropical rain forests; and what advice has been given to any such authorities.

Mr. Ryder: There has been one occasion when a local authority has wished to accept a tender, which was other than the lowest submitted, utilising timber obtained from a sustainable source. On this occasion, it was possible for the purposes of Ministry grant aid to the scheme to agree to the council's wishes, as this was justified on both the longer-term durability and economic advantage of the preferred timber, and also on the grounds of ensuring, where possible, that timber is obtained from sustainable sources.

Potatoes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what recent representations he has received regarding the advisability of abolishing the Potato Marketing Board;

(2) what plans he has to meet members of the Potato Marketing Board to discuss its future;

(3) when he expects to announce the action to be taken by his Department as a result of the recent review of the Potato Marketing Board;

(4) if he will make a statement on the future of the Potato Marketing Board.

Mr. Ryder: The Government's consultation paper on future potato market policy was issued on 6 September 1988 and invited comments by 31 December 1988. By the closing date, 93 individuals and organisations (including the Potato Marketing Board) had commented, and I have received numerous representations since then. In addition, I met the chairman, vice chairman and chief executive of the Potato Marketing Board on 8 March. We are now considering what conclusions to draw from this exercise, and an announcement will not be unduly delayed.

Food Irradiation

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy concerning the irradiation of food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health on 21 February at column *600*.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his estimate of the number of cattle currently incubating bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. MacGregor: Any estimate must be tentative. However, the report of the Southwood working party on BSE estimates that by 1993, the cumulative total of confirmed BSE cases may be about 17,000 to 20,000.

Edible Dormice

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions during each of the last three years he has issued licences to trap edible dormice; to whom those licences were issued; and what information he records about the number of animals so taken.

Mr. Ryder: Licences to trap glis glis (edible dormouse) were issued under section 16(3) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on four occasions in the last three years. The licences were issued to occupiers of commercial forests where this non-indigenous animal was causing serious damage. It was a condition of each licence that the numbers of glis glis taken should be reported to the Ministry. Details are as follows:

Year	*Number taken*
1986 1 Licence	4
1987 1st Licence	43
2nd Licence	14
1988 1 Licence	6

Committee on Food Safety

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) whether he intends to appoint some independent consumers to his committee on food safety;

(2) when he intends to announce the membership of the committee on food safety; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) on 23 March at column *771*.

Organic Farming

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he is currently funding into organic farming.

Mr. Ryder: The following projects are currently being funded by my Department:

1. Winter wheat: disease control in crops grown to organic standards (ADAS).
2. Winter wheat varieties and seed rates for organic systems (ADAS).
3. The nitrogen cycle on organic farms.
   (University College of Wales—Aberystwyth).
4. The use of under sown forage legumes in cereals for nitrogen accumulation in organic arable systems.
   (Elm Farm Research Centre).
5. The availability of water insoluble phosphate and potash sources in organic farming systems.
   (Elm Farm Research Centre).
6. Mixed cropping of cereals and grain legumes (in organic farming).
   (Reading University/Elm Farm Research Centre).

In addition, other research funded by my Department is relevant because it is directed at reducing the use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides, or improving the use of organic wastes from animals and crops.

Farming Industry

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the Government's long-term intentions for the British farming industry, separately for each sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Government continue to provide substantial direct and indirect financial support to the agriculture industry.

The Government's intention is that the United Kingdom agriculture industry should be soundly based and competitive in marketing its products. In particular, the industry needs to prepare itself to take full advantage of the opportunities and challenges which the completion of the single European market of 320 million consumers will bring.

In EC negotiations and domestically the Government will continue to:

- promote the role of the market as the key determinant of farmers' choice of action;
- press for measures which bring supply and demand into better balance;
- seek to reduce further the role of institutional support;
- demand fair competition with no discrimination between member states.

The Government also advocate policies aimed at helping to achieve a better balance between agricultural production and the needs of the rural economy and environment as a whole.

A number of new initiatives have been introduced to encourage farmers to consider ways of utilising their assets to augument their income in ways which reduce surplus production. These include set aside, and the farm woodlands and diversification schemes.

Grain Supplies

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many days' supply of grain are currently in store in the United Kingdom *(a)* in intervention storage and *(b)* in all storage.

Mr. Ryder: Current United Kingdom intervention stocks of wheat and barley represent around 21·5 days' supply of grain. Information on the quantity of grain currently in commercial storage is not available.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the latest estimate of the stocks of grain which will be in store in July 1989 *(a)* in Britain, *(b)* in the European Economic Community and *(c)* in the world, expressed in tonnes and days' supply;

(2) what is the latest estimate of the stocks of grain at the present time *(a)* in Britain, *(b)* in the European Economic Community and *(c)* in the world, expressed in tonnes and days' supply.

Mr. Ryder: Estimates of stocks of grain in store are only available for the end of the cereals marketing year. For the Community, the marketing year ends on 30 June

and the latest estimates for the United Kingdom and the European Community as a whole at the end of June are as follows:

	Million tonnes	*Days' supply*
United Kingdom	5·6	105
EC	39·4	106

The International Wheat Council's estimate of world stocks of grain is an aggregate of national figures based on different definitions of marketing years and therefore does not relate to any particular month. The council's latest estimate for world stocks for the end of the 1988-89 crop year is 228 million tonnes or around 60 days' supply.

Horticulture

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what policy is followed by his Department to help small horticultural companies sell into the markets of the European Economic Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food backs the export efforts of horticultural companies of all sizes. Small companies can benefit particularly from the help we give for the establishment of co-operatives and from half price plant health services.

My ADAS export technical adviser provides free advice to exporters. Food from Britain, whose establishment costs are met by my Department, develops and promotes export opportunities in the Community, and gives exporters advice and help. It also acts as our agent in the administration of the agricultural and horticultural co-operation scheme, under which we provide non-capital grants towards formation and initial management costs of new marketing co-operatives and capital grants on a range of buildings and equipment. My officials in the horticultural marketing inspectorate provide advice on the Community quality standards which apply to most horticultural produce and issue export certificates free of charge. My Department also provides a number of plant health services for companies selling within the Community, including provision of the necessary phytosanitary certificates; small exporters are eligibile for a half price concession on these services. My officials also provide for exporters a summary of the plant health requirements of member states, and have set up the voluntary export nursery approval scheme which facilitates the export of high quality produce.

In addition, my Department tries to help horticulturists to respond to specific challenges. They recently held a conference on horticulture and the single European market to promote awareness of the EC Commission's 1992 initiative, and its implications for all aspects of horticultural businesses.

"Nuclear Accidents and the Farmer"

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by location the farmers who have received his Department's leaflet, "Nuclear Accidents and the Farmer"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 20 March 1989 at column *472* to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). Our initial distribution was to holdings in England in the vicinity of nuclear power stations operated by the Central Electricity Generating Board, licensed nuclear sites of British Nuclear Fuels plc and the various nuclear facilities run by the Ministry of Defence, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and Amersham International plc. Large numbers of copies have also been distributed at meetings held by my officials and in response to individual requests. Distribution has been carried out principally through my Department's regional organisation and no central record has been maintained. Further copies remain available free of charge on request from any of my Department's regional offices.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages Inspectorate

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what reasons other than at the request of the workers involved for not pursuing arrears of wages underpayment were discovered by the wages inspectorate in the midlands in 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: Specific information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, in the small minority of cases where the inspectorate does not pursue arrears the decision is taken only after careful consideration of all the circumstances, including the likelihood of success bearing in mind such factors as the employers' ability to pay and the adequacy of evidence.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of arrears of pay has been discovered by the wages inspectorate as not pursued at the request of workers; what assessment he has made of the reasons which lie behind the requests of workers not to recover their arrears; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In 1988 arrears of pay amounting to £295,746 were not pursued by the wages inspectorate at the request of workers. No comprehensive record is kept of the reasons given by workers for requesting non-pursuance. However, the decisions typically reflect the good personal relationships between employer and worker, concern about the viability of the business, contentment with the rate paid prior to the inspection, or the fact that the underpayment resulted from ignorance or inadvertance. Inspectors must, however, inform the worker of the sum involved and must satisfy themselves that the worker's decision not to pursue payment is made voluntarily.

It is also made clear to the worker that a request not to pursue arrears at a particular time does not prevent them obtaining the inspectorate's help in seeking payment at a later date.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many establishments were found by the wages inspectorate to be underpaying in *(a)* north Staffordshire and *(b)* the Stoke-on-Trent travel-to-work area; what percentage this was of all checked; how many workers were covered; and what was the total and weekly pay involved in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholls: Wages inspectorate statistics are not compiled for areas smaller than the inspectorate's nine divisions, of which the midlands is one. Information on the midlands for 1988 is as follows:

	Information
Number of establishments found underpaying	747
Percentage of all establishments checked found underpaying	14·9 per cent.
Number of workers found underpaid	1,425
Total arrears of pay assessed	£190,698

No statistics are kept on weekly underpayment.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the 10 worst cases of underpayment of wages by midlands employers discovered by the wages inspectorate in 1988, setting out both the weekly and total amounts involved.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Job Clubs

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give his reasons for reducing the number of job clubs; and why the job club in Paignton is under threat of imminent closure.

Mr. Lee: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) on 27 January 1989 at column *810*, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Employment service regional directors are currently considering how the job club network should be reshaped so as most effectively to achieve the objective of increasing numbers of people helped while making more efficient use of resources. There is spare capacity at present in the network in Paignton, Torquay and adjoining areas. This will be taken into account in reaching decisions about its future shape, together with the need to maintain access to the programme for longer term unemployed people in these areas.

Working Mothers

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of mothers with children aged under five years go to work in *(a)* each of the EEC countries, and *(b)* Sweden; what is the average number of hours worked by mothers of children aged under five years in *(a)* each of the EEC countries, and *(b)* Sweden; and what is the comparable information for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cope: It is estimated from the preliminary results of the 1988 labour force survey (LFS) that in spring 1988, 36·4 per cent. of women in the United Kingdom with at least one child aged under five were in employment and their average total usual hours worked were 23·5 hours per week.

Comparable information for other countries is not available in my Department.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people employed in *(a)* the mining industry; *(b)* the steel industry and *(c)* on the railways for the Yorkshire and Humberside region, what was the comparable figure five years and 10 years ago; and if he will break down the answer by sex.

Mr. Lee: The available information for the mining industry and railways for the dates specified is given in the following table. The figures are subject to considerable potential estimation error as the monthly and quarterly employment surveys carried out between censuses of employment are based on samples which are not large enough to provide reliable estimates at regional level for individual industries. Comparable regional estimates of employment in the steel industry are available only from the censuses of employment held in September 1981 and September 1984, and these are included in the table.

	September 1978			*September 1981*[1]			*September 1983*			*September 1984*[1]			*September 1988*		
	Males	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*
Coal extraction and manufacture of solid fuels (class 11)[2]	76·4	3·3	79·8	76·2	3·3	79·5	68·0	3·0	71·0	63·3	2·9	66·1	31·9	1·5	33·4
Iron and steel industry (activity heading 2210)[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	37·5	3·9	41·5	n/a	n/a	n/a	26·1	2·1	28·2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Steel tubes (activity heading 2220)[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	0·5	0·2	0·7	n/a	n/a	n/a	0·5	0·1	0·6	n/a	n/a	n/a
Drawing, cold rolling and cold forming of steel (group 223)[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	5·8	1·1	6·9	n/a	n/a	n/a	4·4	0·8	5·2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Railways (activity heading 7100)[2]	18·5	1·5	20·0	16·8	1·4	18·2	15·2	1·2	16·4	14·6	1·2	15·9	13·3	0·8	14·1

[1] Census of employment data.
[2] Sub division of the 1980 Standard Industrial Classification.
n/a—Not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the annual number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time working women for each year since 1979 in the Yorkshire and Humberside region; and what was the annual percentage change.

Mr. Lee: For the dates specified the only available information about female full and part-time employment in regions is for employees in employment. The latest date for which estimates are available is September 1988. The information is as follows:

Female employees in employment in Yorkshire and Humberside region

Thousand

	Full-time		*Part-time*	
September each year	*Number*	*Percentage change since previous September*	*Number*	*Percentage change since previous September*
1979	457	−1	356	4
1980	441	−4	353	−1
1981	418	−5	347	−2
1982	404	−3	349	1
1983	403	0	352	1
1984	408	1	361	3

September each year	Full-time Number	Full-time Percentage change since previous September	Part-time Number	Part-time Percentage change since previous September
1985	411	1	373	3
1986	410	0	387	4
1987	427	4	391	1
1988	452	6	395	1

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been out of work for over *(a)* 12 months, *(b)* two years and *(c)* three years for the most recent date for which figures are available; and what are the comparable figures for similar dates in 1984 and 1979.

Mr. Lee: Direct comparisons of unemployment by duration since 1979 are not possible because of changes in the coverage of the count. The following is the available information, which is also obtainable from the Library.

Unemployment by duration in the United Kingdom

Duration of unemployment	January 1979 Unemployed registrants[1]	January 1984 Unemployed claimants	January 1989 Unemployed claimants
Over 1 year	354,204	1,188,040	821,419
Over 2 years	n/a	616,411	544,507
Over 3 years	n/a	332,199	410,667

[1] In October 1982 registration at jobcentres became voluntary, necessitating a change to counting claimants at unemployment benefit offices.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the fall in unemployment in East Anglia during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: In February 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in East Anglia was 37,100 compared with 57,200 in February 1988, a fall of 20,100 or 35·1 per cent.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were employed in Cleveland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lee: The latest available employment estimates for the county are from the September 1984 census of employment. There were then 183,600 employees in employment in Cleveland. This compares with a figure of 207,000 in September 1981 when the previous census of employment was taken.

More up-to-date county employee estimates, from the September 1987 census of employment, will become available later this year.

Re-start Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress on the re-start scheme in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of South Yorkshire.

Mr. Lee: From 28 March 1988 to 24 February 1989 just over 12,000 interviews have been carried out in Doncaster, of which 91 per cent. have resulted in an offer of positive help being made. Nearly 4,000 interviews have been carried out in Mexborough, of which 90 per cent. have resulted in an offer of positive help being made.

The re-start programme now offers interviews at six-monthly intervals to everyone who has been unemployed for six months or more. In addition, certain clients are now offered follow-up interviews in order to provide further guidance and support.

Since September 1988 the programme has delivered the Government's guarantee to people aged between 18 and 24 who have been unemployed for between six and 12 months, of the offer of a place on employment training, in a job club or on the enterprise allowance scheme.

Single Parents

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the numbers of single parents on employment training schemes on *(a)* 28 February and *(b)* 31 January in (i) the south Tyne area, (ii) the north Tyne area, (iii) the Gateshead local authority area and (iv) the Newcastle local authority area.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available.

Pneumoconiosis (Compensation)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications he has received for compensation during 1988 under the provisions of the 1979 Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act; how many of these were approved and what is the total money paid out for these cases; how many applications were rejected; and how many are still waiting to be determined.

Mr. Nicholls: During 1988, 108 applications were received for compensation under the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979. Of these, 50 were approved, totalling £443,257 in compensation payments, 53 were not accepted and one was withdrawn; four of the 1988 applications are still awaiting determination.

Low Pay Unit (West Yorkshire)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to visit the West Yorkshire low pay unit.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend has no such plans.

Labour Statistics (East Midlands)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the average monthly fall in the number of unemployed in the east midlands during the last quarter for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: The information is available from the Library. In the quarter ending February 1989, the average monthly fall in unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the east midlands was 3,600. Unemployment in the east midlands has fallen by 35,300 or 22.8 per cent. over the last 12 months.

Self-employed

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the increase in the number of self-employed since June 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: Between June 1987 and September 1988, the latest date for which estimates are available, there was a net increase of 156,000 in the estimated number of self-employed people in Great Britain. It is estimated that nearly 3 million people are now self-employed and the number is still rising. The numbers of self-employed people have risen by over 60 per cent. since 1979 and they now represent almost one in nine of the work force in employment.

Birds Eye

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union to discuss the closure of the Birds Eye factory at Kirkby; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I have no such plans. The decision to close the factory was made by the company on commercial grounds and I cannot see that such a meeting would serve any useful purpose.

Closed Shop

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress to discuss his Green Paper on the closed shop; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no current plans for such a meeting.

Labour Statistics (South-East)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the rise in the number of people in employment in the south-east since June 1987.

Mr. Lee: Between June 1987 and September 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, there was an increase of 363,000 in the civilian work force in employment in the south-east region. The civilian work force in employment is the sum of employees in employment, the self-employed and participants in work-related Government training programmes. Comparisons of data for June 1987 and September 1988 are affected by seasonal variations. Seasonally adjusted employment estimates are not available for regions.

Labour Statistics (West Midlands)

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the fall in unemployment in the west midlands during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: In February 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the west midlands was 186,800 compared with 253,100 in February 1988, a fall of 66,300 or 26·2 per cent.

Labour Statistics (Merseyside)

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the latest unemployment figures for Merseyside.

Mr. Lee: The information is available from the Library. In February 1989, the latest available date, the number of unemployed claimants in Merseyside was 98,188, a fall of 19,438 over the last 12 months.

Tourism

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to be able to make an announcement about the outcome of the review on tourism.

Mr. Lee: The tourism review report is still under consideration. An announcement will be made in due course.

London Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects unemployment to begin to fall faster in the three London Docklands boroughs than the average rate for London.

Mr. Lee: There is a very large number of new jobs in prospect for London Docklands which should have a beneficial effect on unemployment in the area. However, my Department does not make estimates of future levels of unemployment.

Training Agency (Staff)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the numbers of staff in post in *(a)* the Inner London, North, *(b)* the Inner London, South, *(c)* the East London Training Agency offices and *(d)* the Docklands liaison group, during each of the past two years and currently.

Mr. Nicholls: The average numbers of staff-in-post for Inner London, North, Inner London, South and East London Training Agency area offices for the last two years and currently are listed in Table 1.

When first set up in September 1987 the work of the Docklands liaison group was undertaken by Training Agency East London area office staff. It is not therefore possible to give precise numbers of staff engaged on that work. The group became self contained in April 1988 and the average number of Employment Department staff in post during that year was 10·5. The same number of staff were in post on 31 March 1989.

Table 1

	1987	*1988*	*Current (31 March 1989)*
Inner London North	98	110	110
Inner London South	74·5	83	85
East London	58	67	65·5

Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average payment of benefit, plus the additional £10, per employment training place.

Mr. Nicholls: The average weekly training allowance including the training premium is estimated to be around £50 per trainee on employment training.

Foreign Nationals

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the labour force in the tourist, hotel and catering industry consists of foreign nationals.

Mr. Lee: According to preliminary results from the 1988 labour force survey, 8 per cent of all persons in employment in hotels and catering and other tourism-related industries are foreign nationals.

Part-time Work

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the principal differences between regulations and restrictions on part-time work in European Economic Community countries other than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Cope: My Department does not have comprehensive and up-to-date information on this subject. It could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Construction Industry

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the size of the occupational categories for the construction industry for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates from the labour force survey (LFS) of persons in employment in the construction industry in Great Britain by occupation, for LFS years since 1979, are as shown in the following table:

Persons in employment in construction industry[1]—occupational analysis
Great Britain, Spring each year

Thousands

CODOT major groups	*1979*	*1981*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*[2]1988*
I Professional and related supporting management and administration	32	29	31	43	56	49	40	44
II Professional and related in education, welfare and health	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
III Literary, artistic and sports	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
IV Professional and related in science, engineering, technology and similar fields	90	71	98	106	132	119	130	113
V Managerial	96	91	100	107	106	101	107	121
VI Clerical and related	116	101	109	129	138	132	142	149
VII Selling	13	12	15	14	16	15	17	15
VIII Security and protective service	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
IX Catering, cleaning, hairdressing and other personal service	11	13	[3]—	13	13	12	15	15
X Farming, fishing and related	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
XI Materials processing, making and repairing (excluding metal and electrical)	174	177	175	191	195	187	169	167
XII Processing, making, repairing and related (metal and electrical)	353	305	310	295	268	262	330	326
XIII Painting, repetitive assembling, product inspecting, packaging and related	158	128	155	158	155	142	145	153
XIV Construction, mining and related not identified elsewhere	590	549	604	619	584	592	625	670
XV Transport operating, materials moving and storing and related	103	85	83	82	66	70	82	72
XVI Miscellaneous	35	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[4]0	14	11	[3]—
All occupations	1,782	1,575	1,699	1,774	1,753	1,705	1,828	1,861

[1] 1979: SIC '68, order XX 1981-88: SIC '80 division 5.
[2] Preliminary estimates (1988 only).
[3] Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.
[4] Includes inadequately described/not stated.
Source: Labour Force Surveys.

Trade Union Ballots

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to how many work forces balloted in 1988 by their trade union on whether to take industrial action voted against the proposal.

Mr. Nicholls: There is no statutory requirement for a union to notify such a ballot, or details of its result, other than to those given entitlement to vote. I understand, however, that the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service is aware of 23 union ballots in 1988 asking members whether they were willing to take part in, or continue with, industrial action which resulted in a majority against doing so.

Marine Fish Farms

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspections of marine fish farms have been made in each of the last five years by the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Nicholls: This information is not available in the form requested.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors were conducting preventative inspections on the following dates: 6 June 1988, 7 September 1988 and 23 January 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Factory inspectors in the Health and Safety Executives area office are not employed solely on

preventive inspection but also make visits in response to accidents or other incidents, complaints, inquiries or to follow up previously identified shortcomings.

Staffing figures are recorded on the first of each month. The numbers of factory inspectors in area offices on 1 June 1988, 1 September 1988 and 1 February 1989 were 520, 522 and 533, respectively.

Children (Injuries)

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *373-4*, he will place in the Library anonymised summaries of the circumstances of *(a)* fatal, *(b)* major and *(c)* over three day injuries to children in 1987-88; and if he will make it his policy to make such summaries available in future years.

Mr. Nicholls: No. The cost would be disproportionately high.

Unique Fresh, Swansea

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why there has been a delay in paying the protective award of four weeks' pay agreed by a tribunal in February to workers made redundant by Unique Fresh in Swansea in August 1988; and when his Birmingham office will ensure that payment is made.

Mr. Nicholls: Because the firm is insolvent the amount of the protective award is payable from the redundancy fund subject to the various limits specified in part VII of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978. My Department is awaiting the insolvency practitioner's statement of the amount due. When this is available we shall pay the employees as soon as possible.

Benefit (Suspensions)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many claims for unemployment benefit have been received since the increase in the maximum number of weeks' suspension of unemployment benefit from 13 weeks to 26 weeks at unemployment benefit offices in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; in how many of these cases the maximum 26 weeks' suspension has been initially applied by the adjudication officers; in how many cases where the maximum 26 weeks' suspension has been applied the length of suspension has been reduced on review of the case; and in how many cases where the 26 weeks' suspension has been initially applied, the suspension has been reduced on appeal.

Mr. Lee *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* The table shows, for the period April 1988 to February 1989, the number of claims for unemployment benefit that were received for the locations requested.

Information is not available on how many of these claims were disqualified by the adjudication officer, nor on the numbers where the maximum period of disqualification was imposed or reduced on review or appeal.

Locations	*Number of claims taken for period April 1988 to February 1989*
Greenock and Port Glasgow	6,788
Strathclyde	177,619
Scotland	456,063

Departmental Advertising, Publicity and Publications

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Departmental budget for 1989-90 for spending on general publicity, including *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising *(c)* newspaper advertising, and *(d)* other promotional material; and what are the equivalent figures for the Training Agency.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The information on my departmental budget for 1989-90 for spending on general publicity, to include that for the Training Agency, will be found in table 7.29 on page 25 of the "Public Expenditure" White Paper, column 607, published January 1989.

Detailed decisions on expenditure by media group for 1989-90 as requested have not yet been taken.

WALES

River Quality

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales to what extent the new regulations for classifying the quality of rivers will specify requirements as to the substances that are to be present or absent from the water, and the concentration of such substances, for the purpose of ensuring the conditions needed for the survival of certain aquatic plant and invertebrate communities.

Mr. Grist: Regulations for classifying the quality of rivers have not yet been prepared. We will be consulting widely on proposals for possible revisions to the classification systems later in the spring. This represents the first stage in developing new systems of classification for rivers and estuaries which can, in due course, be embodied in regulations. I will arrange for the hon. Gentleman to receive a copy of the consultation paper when it is issued.

Accidents in the Home

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to place a duty on Welsh district councils for each authority to appoint a home safety officer to tackle the problem of accidents in Welsh homes.

Mr. Grist: No. Home safety officers who are appointed by local authorities make an important contribution to accident prevention, but it is for an individual local authority to decide whether such an appointment is appropriate for any accident prevention strategy in its own area.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he plans to place a mandatory duty on Welsh local authorities to devise preventive measures to reduce the level of accidents in Welsh homes.

Mr. Grist: No. Welsh local authorities already have a statutory duty to enforce the safety legislation. They also

engage in other accident prevention initiatives but decisions on what is appropriate or desirable in each area should be taken by the local authority itself in the light of local circumstances.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what education or training initiatives he is planning to reduce the level of fatal and other serious accidents in Welsh homes.

Mr. Grist: Since 1987 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has run a series of safety awareness and education campaigns throughout the United Kingdom. These have included child safety initiatives; electrical safety awareness and, in particular, promoting the use of RCDs (residual current devices) and the publication of a guide to producing better instructions and warnings for consumer products. In Wales these campaigns have benefited greatly from the support of the Welsh local authorities. Some of the campaigns will be extended or repeated and over the next few months a number of further safety initiatives are planned.

South Beach Hotel, Tenby

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects CADW to announce a decision on the appeal under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 by Mr. P. T. Harris in respect of the South Beach hotel, Tenby.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Mr. Harris has submitted four appeals in respect of the South Beach hotel. The appeals, made under section 88 and section 97 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 are being considered concurrently.

My right hon. Friend is aware of the need to reach speedy decisions on all planning matters which come before him and decisions on these appeals will be issued as soon as possible.

Hospital Referrals

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospital referral rate per 1,000 of population for each family practitioner committee in Wales in the latest available year.

Mr. Grist: The information is not immediately available. I will write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Prescribing Costs

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the per capita prescribing cost for each family practitioner committee in Wales for the latest available year.

Mr. Grist: The information which relates to prescriptions submitted for payment during 1988, is shown in the following table:

Average total cost per person on NHS prescribing lists

	£
Clwyd	53·31
Dyfed	51·94
Gwent	53·77
Gwynedd	57·15
Mid Glamorgan	58·08
Powys	50·07
South Glamorgan	48·47
West Glamorgan	54·97

Set-aside Schemes

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers in *(a)* Pembrokeshire and *(b)* Wales have applied for set-aside payments; and what is the total acreage for which claims have been made and the total amount claimed in each category.

Mr. Peter Walker: Fifteen farmers from the Preseli Pembrokeshire and South Pembrokeshire districts have applied to join the scheme, entering a total of 295 hectares. The figures for Wales are 35 farmers involving 1,008 hectares. Since payments are made annually in arreas, no claims are yet due.

Farmers (Income)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to the total income of farmers in Wales, in the latest year for which figures are available, from *(a)* farming and *(b)* other activities; and what were the comparable figures for 1984 and 1979.

Mr. Peter Walker: Based on the Inland Revenue's survey of personal incomes, details of which are to be published shortly in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom" the total incomes of self employed individuals in agriculture in Wales assessed for tax were as follows:

£ million

	Income from Agriculture and Horticulture	*Income from other activities*	*Total Income*
1985-86	160·1	94·9	255·0
1984-85	159·3	111·6	270·9

Figures for Wales for the year 1979-80 are not available except at disproportionate cost.

Patients (Gwynedd)

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients in Gwynedd receive treatment for ileostomy, colostomy and urostomy; and if he will give the number in each category on a constituency basis.

Mr. Grist: Information in the form requested is not available.

The available information on operations performed on residents from Gwynedd as in-patients or day cases at Welsh hospitals is shown in the following table. The information relates to 1987:

Op Code/Description	*Number*
453 Enterostomy (ileostomy)	0
454 Anastomosis of intestine (including ileo-colostomy)	2
460 Colectomy and resection (including colostomy and ileostomy)	64
462 Primary colostomy	4
464 Colon by-pass	1

Op Code/Description		*Number*
533	Anastomosis of pancreatic duct (including ileo-pancreatostomy)	0
591	Urinary diversion to bladder	2
592	Urinary diversion to bowel	0
593	Urinary diversion: anastomosis	1
594	Urinary diversion: other	1
595	Repair of urinary tract	2
Total		77

Note: These figures include six Gwynedd residents treated in Clwyd and four Gwynedd residents treated in East Dyfed.

NHS Reform

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will be publishing supplementary working papers on the future organisation of the National Health Service in Wales; what programme of consultation with which organisations will be undertaken; and how the general public will be informed of the details not included in the White Paper itself.

Mr. Grist: In addition to the working papers on the implementation of the proposals contained in the White Paper "Working For Patients" which the Welsh Office has already circulated to interested bodies in the NHS in Wales, further guidance will be issued during the course of the year as appropriate.

We have already had discussions about the White Paper with the Wales TUC and are shortly to meet the chairman of district health authorities, family practitioner committees, and the statutory advisory committees and representatives of NHS staff organisations and health care professions. In addition, officials of the Welsh Office are engaged upon a round of discussions with a range of NHS interests.

We have already announced that there will be public consultation later this year to provide clearer and more focused representation of consumer interests. We shall announce decisions on the details of particular proposals as appropriate.

Report (Bristol University)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to publish the commissioned report of the School for Advanced Urban Studies, university of Bristol, made for his housing department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We are still awaiting the final report from the School for Advanced Urban Studies.

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing for each area of Wales the number of people who are dependent on their local authority providing them with bed and breakfast.

Mr. Grist: The numbers of households accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation at 31 December 1988 under part III of the Housing Act 1985 in each district authority is given in the following table. The number of persons in those households is not available centrally.

Number of households accommodated in bed and breakfast at 31 December 1988[1]

	Number
Aberconwy	—
Alyn and Deeside	—
Arfon	—
Blaenau Gwent	—
Brecknock	1
Cardiff	23
Carmarthen	1
Ceredigion	1
Colwyn	—
Cynon Valley	—
Delyn	1
Dinefwr	2
Dwyfor	—
Glyndwr	—
Islwyn	1
Llanelli	—
Lliw Valley	—
Meirionnydd	—
Merthyr Tydfil	—
Monmouth	—
Montgomery	—
Neath	—
Newport	—
Ogwr	—
Port Talbot	—
Preseli	8
Radnor	—
Rhondda	—
Rhuddlan	—
Rhymney Valley	3
South Pembrokeshire	—
Swansea	—
Taff-Ely	—
Torfaen	—
Vale of Glamorgan	—
Wrexham Maelor	—
Ynys Môn	—
Wales Total	41

[1] Under Part III of the Housing Act 1985.

Rating Reform

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bridgend of 27 February, *Official Report*, column *19*, concerning expenditure provision of £9 million in the 1989-90 rate support grant settlement to cover the cost of implementing the poll tax, what proportion of that sum the actual cash grant will represent.

Mr. Grist: Rate support grant is paid to all authorities in Wales in support of their expenditure generally and is not hypothecated. It is not therefore possible to calculate a notional allocation of grant to any particular function.

Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many schools there were in Wales in 1979; and how many there are in the current year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Number of Schools in Wales

	January 1979	*January 1989*
Nursery	70	56
Primary	1,930	1,744
Secondary	244	232
Special	74	64

	January 1979	January 1989
Independent	[1]71	65
Total	2,389	2,161

[1] Includes three direct grant schools.

Teachers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many teachers there are in Wales *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools in the current year; and what were the corresponding numbers in May 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information available relates to January 1979 and September 1988. At those dates the numbers in full-time equivalent terms, of teachers in Wales is shown in the following tables:

	January 1979	September 1988
Primary Schools	13,581	11,724
Secondary Schools	14,413	12,504

These figures must, of course, be considered in the light of falling pupil numbers as follows:

	January 1979	September 1988
Primary pupils	298,196	255,869
Secondary pupils	241,662	192,803

Pupil:teacher ratios have improved over the period as follows:

	January 1979	September 1988
Primary pupils/teacher	22·0	21·8
Secondary pupils/teacher	16·8	15·4

Hospital Closures

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospitals have been closed in Wales since may 1979; how many hospital beds there were in May 1979 in Wales; and what is the number for the present day.

Mr. Grist: Since 1 May 1979 the number of hospitals which have closed, and are still closed, is 22. However during the same period seven hospitals (including four district general hospitals) have opened.

The available information on the number of staffed beds allocated, as at 31 March, is as follows:

	Number
1979	23,693
1988	21,242

Council House Sales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Wales since May 1979; what is the total value of the houses sold since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: A total of 66,593 local authority dwellings were sold to sitting tenants between April 1979 and December 1988. The value of these dwellings is not available. The capital value (net of discount) of the total of 66,875 dwellings sold during that period, which includes sales other than those to sitting tenants, was however £564 million.

Council Houses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been built since May 1979; what is the estimated value; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: A total of 17,662 local authority dwellings have been built since May 1979. Information on the value of these buildings is not available centrally.

Housing Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of people currently on the waiting lists of Welsh housing authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Information on the number of people on housing waiting lists is not held centrally.

Homelessness

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homeless persons there are estimated to be in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The normal measure of statutory homelessness is given by cases accepted by local authorities under part III of the Housing Act 1985. The number of persons in households accepted as homeless during the third quarter of 1988 (July-September) was 4,534.

Bristol Channel (Sewage)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the Welsh Water Authority's intention to build a sewerage outlet one mile out into the Bristol channel from Swansea; if planning permission has been given; and if he will make a statement on the anticipated environmental effect of raw sewage flooding into the Bristol channel.

Mr. Grist: Welsh water authority has proposals for improving the quality of Swansea bay, which currently fails to meet the standards of the EC bathing water directive. Whilst the provision of a long sea outfall is likely to form part of the improvements, planning approval for which would not be required, details have yet to be finalised.

Sewage discharged to sea is treated through the disinfecting action of salt water, sunlight and waves which together break down the bacteria as effectively as inland treatment. That is why the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution concluded in its 10th report that with well designed sewage outfalls, the discharge of sewage to the sea was not only acceptable but environmentally preferable in many cases to alternative means of disposal.

"Roads in Wales"

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to publish the new editions of "Roads in Wales".

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I am pleased to say that it has been published today. Copies are available in the Vote Office, and have also been placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Firearms)

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will state the conditions with regard to the carrying of firearms which have to be observed by Royal Ulster Constabulary officers whilst in the territory of the Irish Republic for the purpose of discussing anti-terrorist co-operation with their counterparts in the police force of the Republic.

Mr. Ian Stewart: Authorisation for the carrying of firearms by officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary whether on or off duty is confined to Northern Ireland.

Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest figure for the estimated spending in 1988-89 by the Northern Ireland Office on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material; and what is the 1989-90 budget for each of these categories of spending.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the latest figure for the estimated spending on all advertising and other promotional material for my Department in 1988-89 is £4,782,821. The estimated budget for 1989-90 is £4,777,950.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest figures for the number of staff presently employed, and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, in the press and public relations office of the Northern Ireland Office; and what is the proposed complement for 1989-90.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* At present 50 staff are employed in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments. The full complement, including vacant posts, is 52. The proposed complement for 1989-90 is 51.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest figure for *(a)* the estimated expenditure by his Department on press and public relations during 1988-89 and *(b)* the budget for 1989-90.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 13 March 1989]:* The latest figure for the total estimated expenditure on press and public relations during 1988-89 is £1,174,402.

The total budget for 1989-90 is £1,310,700.

RUC Traffic Division

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the strength of the Royal Ulster Constabulary traffic division in each year since 1980 to the latest available date; and whether there are any plans to increase it.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information requested is not readily available prior to 1985 and could be obtained only at disproprtinate cost. The available information is as follows:

Year	*RUC Traffic Division (Strength)*
31 December 1985	401
31 December 1986	363
31 December 1987	361
31 December 1988	316
20 March 1989	312

The operational strength of the RUC's traffic division is a matter for the chief constable.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants investigated in the inquiry into the Kincora boys' home in 1982 by Sir George Terry are still employed by his Department.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1988]:* I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 26 February 1988 at column *322*.

Information Units

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which parts of the information policy unit, the information liaison unit and the information planning unit are still in operation; and what was the status of each such unit within the structure of his Department at the time it was most recently in existence.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Member on 23 May 1988 at columns *36-37*.

SCOTLAND

Catholic Marriage Advisory Council

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the withdrawal of funding for the Scottish Catholic Marriage Advisory Council by the social work services group.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I am considering a number of representations made by and on behalf of the Scottish Catholic Marriage Advisory Council against the recent decision not to award it a training grant under section 9 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. The council will be informed of my decision as soon as possible.

Nurses (Grading)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the total number of appeals against regrading which have been received in each Scottish health board area; how many have now been assessed; and how many have resulted in a subsequent upgrading of the nurse's grade.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 6 April 1989.

Water Rates

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the representations he has had regarding the commercial effects of increased water rates; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Representations expressing concern about the effect of increased water rates have been received on behalf of 12 trade and business associations, eight companies and one community council group.

I would refer to the answers I gave the hon. Member on 15 February at columns *218-20*.

Suicides

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish what information he has on the number of suicides and attempted suicides which have occurred in Scotland in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available is as follows:

	Number of Suicides[1]	*Number of in-patient discharges for self-inflicted injury or poisoning*[2]
1979	494	9,916
1980	515	8,609
1981	517	9,474
1982	563	9,269
1983	505	8,707
1984	519	9,337
1985	569	9,118
1986	568	8,963
1987	522	9,306

Data source:
[1] Registrar General for Scotland
[2] Scottish hospital data within admissions category "Emergency—Deliberate self inflicted injury or poisoning."

Transport Users Consultative Committee

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names and addresses of the current members of the Transport Users Consultative Committee for Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The current membership of the committee was published in its annual report for 1987-88. Mr. John Corrie was appointed chairman to the committee in succession to Colonel W. A. Dalziel in December 1988. Copies of the report are available in the House of Commons Library and may also be obtained from:

The Secretary
Scottish Transport Users Consultative Committee
249 West George Street
Glasgow
G2 4QE

through whom contact with individual members may also be made.

Head Injuries

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what facilities currently exist in Scotland for intensive specialised rehabilitation of traumatic brain damage caused by head injury; what plans he has to set up such a specialised unit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps have been taken to implement the Mair report recommendation in 1972 that two specialised centres providing specialist rehabilitation treatment for traumatic brain damage through head injury were required in Scotland;

(3) if he will estimate the annual additional need that arises every year in Scotland for places which provide specialist rehabilitation for patients who suffer traumatic brain damage through head injury;

(4) what proportion of the population suffer from permanent long term disability following head injury; and what is the average age at the time of the injury and the average life expectancy thereafter;

(5) what specialist training and advice is given to care professionals treating patients with traumatic brain damage caused by head injury;

(6) what medical studies have been carried out into the special needs of those who suffer traumatic brain damage through injury;

(7) what evidence exists to demonstrate the efficacy of specialist rehabilitation of patients who suffer traumatic brain damage through head injury;

(8) what advice is given to area health boards regarding the provision of specialist rehabilitation of patients with traumatic brain damage caused by head injury, and what checks are made on the quality of long-term care provided to such patients by the area health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Provision of specialist treatment and rehabilitation facilities for head injured patients in Scotland is a matter for individual health boards. The Scottish Home and Health Department is currently considering as a matter of urgency the needs of brain-injured patients and the most appropriate form of rehabilitation facility which is required. The Mair report did not make a specific recommendation that two specialised centres were required.

It is understood that around 100 patients each year are left with severe disability following traumatic brain injury. The average age of these patients is around 28 and life expectancy is 30 or 40 years. All doctors, nurses and members of paramedical professions receive basic training in rehabilitation techniques. The two main centres for the treatment and rehabilitation of patients with traumatic brain injury are located in Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively and it is there that care professionals can gain training and experience. A wide range of studies has been carried out into the special needs of brain-damaged patients, and a number demonstrate the efficacy of specialist rehabilitation.

Boards providing general rehabilitation services are aware of the more specialised facilities available in Edinburgh and Glasgow for more severe cases of head injury and can seek advice if necessary. Patients are referred from other boards to these specialised facilities. Long-term in-patient care is provided generally within psychiatric or geriatric hospitals. Both are inspected regularly by the Scottish Hospital Advisory Service; in addition the Mental Welfare Commission makes annual visits to all mental hospitals.

New Towns

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those organisations which have asked that

their responses to the consultation document "The Scottish New Towns, Maintaining the Momentum" be treated in confidence.

Mr. Lang: No, since the respondents asked that their responses be treated in confidence; there were two such responses.

Transport

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he is now having with the trade unions, entrepreneurs and environmentalists regarding the case for fast trains between Scotland and the continent for the Scottish manufacturing industry, and the environmental requirements which the Scottish people demand from railways and motorways.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None at the present time. British Rail is still working on its proposals for Channel Tunnel passenger and freight services and any associated investment. It is required by section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 to publish a plan by the end of the year.

As part of this process, British Rail is consulting with a wide range of interests in Scotland in a series of meetings.

DEFENCE

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) what consideration he has given to the procurement of smart cruise missiles for British forces;

(2) what consideration he has given to the procurement for the British forces of cruise missiles armed with cluster munitions; and what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on the stationing of such missiles on British territory or in British territorial waters.

Mr. Sainsbury: A number of future missile options are under consideration.

Unit Production Costs

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish of 22 March, *Official Report*, column *616*, when it became his policy not to publish unit production costs.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) on 14 January 1988 at column *373*.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many National Health Service *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients have been treated at the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, during each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my predecessor on 28 April at columns *242-43*. It has not proved possible to produce reliable information for the years prior to 1983 when the records were maintained manually. The comparable figures for 1988 are: in-patients 6,507; day patients 1,575; out-patients 5,208.

Armed Forces (Postal Voting)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from members of the armed forces and their dependents serving overseas regarding the introduction of postal voting in United Kingdom elections; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: I am not aware of any recent representations on postal voting overseas. The Representation of the People Act provides a separate registration procedure for service personnel enabling them to retain their right to vote when serving overseas and allows the spouses of service personnel to register under this procedure if they so wish. Currently service personnel and their spouses must vote by proxy when overseas. They can use either the proxy or the postal voting procedure if serving away from their constituency but within the United Kingdom.

Royal Ordnance

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the financial arrangements between his Department and Royal Ordnance plc for the deployment of Ministry of Defence police at Royal Ordnance Bishopton;

(2) what financial arrangements exist between his Department and Royal Ordnance plc for providing the services of Ministry of Defence police at Royal Ordnance factories.

Mr. Sainsbury: Under the terms of an agreement made in April 1985 on the deployment of MOD police at Royal Ordnance sites, including Bishopton, RO plc pays the equivalent of a commercial charge for the services of the MOD police.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, in the light of recent developments and the announcement by Royal Ordnance plc that it is considering a partial reprieve of the site, it is intended to retain a complement of Ministry of Defence police at Royal Ordnance Bishopton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: No decision has yet been taken on whether MOD police should remain at Royal Ordnance, Bishopton.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Prime Minister's Speeches

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the *(a)* statements and *(b)* other speeches in debate made by Prime Ministers in each of the last 15 years.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the relevant published indexes of the *Official Report* and to information held on POLIS in the House of Commons Library.

Sir Leon Brittan

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Lord President of the Council if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Falkirk,

East (Mr. Ewing) on 6 April, concerning statements made by Sir Leon Brittan, he will give the name of any documents, together with appropriate references, that show that approval was given by two named officials to the disclosure of a letter from the Solicitor-General; and if he will place copies of any such documents in the Library.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the Gentleman to the fourth report of the Select Committee on Defence for the 1985-86 Session.

Food Consultants

Ms. Walley: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the policy of the Commission on the level of nutritional expertise which it will require in respect of the appointment of consultants on the provision of food in the House.

Mr. Beith: Policy matters concerning the Refreshment Department are the responsibility of the General Manager of the Department on the advice of the Catering Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services). The Commission considers proposals for expenditure from the Refreshment Department trading fund account in accordance with the general principles of financial prudence.

HEALTH

Benzodiazepines

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions for benzodiazepines were prescribed in *(a)* January to June 1987, *(b)* July to December 1987, *(c)* January to June 1988 and *(d)* July to December 1988.

Mr. Mellor: The number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain during the periods in question were as follows:

	Number of prescriptions (millions)
January to June 1987	12·7
July to December 1987	12·8
January to June 1988	11·9
July to December 1988	[1]

[1] Not yet available.

Coronary Heart Disease

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the mortality rate from coronary heart disease for men aged under 65 years from 1979 to the present time, analysed by socio-economic group.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

AIDS

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment Sir Donald Acheson has made of the plant alkaloid Castanospermine, as a possible treatment for certain forms of AIDS, in the light of clinical tests at St. Mary's hospital in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I understand that there have been some in vitro tests involving derivatives of Castanospermine, but none involving patients. If the hon. Member would like more information he may wish to approach the Medical Research Council.

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the information he has regarding problems in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is responsible for recruiting staff below the executive officer (and equivalent) grades. No major recruitment problems are currently being encountered at its Titchfield and Southport locations but, in common with other Departments, there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining administrative officers, personal secretaries and administrative assistants at its London headquarters.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether interviewers employed by the Office of the Population Censuses and Surveys are termed employees of the Crown; and to what pension rights they are entitled to under existing legislation.

Mr. Freeman: Interviewers employed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys are employees of the Crown. Under existing social security legislation, interviewers have a choice between contributing to SERPS (provided that their earnings are sufficient) or to a personal pension.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many men and women are employed as interviewers by the Office of the Population Censuses and Surveys on *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* a part-time basis.

Mr. Freeman: Interviewing work carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys fluctuates with the demand for surveys and with the requirements of individual surveys. As a result the number of interviewers employed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys is variable. At present, 476 hourly-paid interviewers are employed, of whom 52 are male and 424 are female.

Interviewers are not guaranteed any fixed amount of work and are paid on an hourly fee basis for work undertaken. The nature of the work means that all interviewers are employed on a part-time basis.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of unfilled vacancies at the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys as a percentage of total employees and by job category and *(b)* the average length of time taken to fill a vacancy by job category at the office.

Mr. Freeman: *(a)* The information is in the table. The numbers of unfilled vacancies are the difference between staff in post and the staff profile, as at 1 March 1989, the latest date for which information is available. Casual staff are excluded.

Job category	Vacancies	Percentage of employees	Percentage of profile
Grade 7 and above	(+4·0)	(+4·7)	(+4·9)
Senior executive officer—executive officer and equivalents	33·0	5·6	5·3
Administrative officers and assistants	39·5	3·4	3·3
Other staff	34·5	15·4	13·4
Total	103·0	5·0	4·8

(b) Due to the different recruitment methods and wide variation between categories, this information is not collected and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the Civil Service pay rates applicable to interviewers employed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and *(b)* the starting times for shift work when applicable.

Mr. Freeman: Interviewers employed by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys are paid one of seven rates ranging at present from £3·69 to £5·38 per hour plus expenses. In addition, higher rates are paid for unsocial hours and to interviewers based in the London area.

Interviewers' pay is linked to the pay spine agreed between HM Treasury and the Institution of Professional Civil Servants. This link is solely a means of determining pay movement.

A minority of interviewers work on projects with fixed starting and finishing times. With the exception of a small group of interviewers whose starting time is normally 4.15 pm on weekdays and 9.30 am on Saturdays, starting times vary by location and to take account of the requirements of particular surveys.

Social Work

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to ensure that the Government's rejection of the proposed three year qualification for social work does not jeopardise the achievement of parity of recognition of British social work qualifications alongside other European qualifications.

Mr. Mellor: The European Community directive on a general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas was adopted on 21 December 1988 and will be implemented in European Community member states on 4 January 1991. It will make it easier for members of a number of professional groups to practice in other member states.

The Government and the European Commission support the principle of mutual recognition of qualifications irrespective of length of training and will be working towards this in the context of completing the single market by 1992.

The Government, meanwhile, fully recognise the importance of achieving high standards of training for social workers and other staff employed in the personal social services. We are promoting, with full knowledge of the Directive and in co-operation with the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work and other organisations, a number of improvements to present arrangements.

Health Care Providers

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration has been given to the effect on the need for patients with long-term care needs to develop a relationship of trust with health care providers of proposals for health authorities to buy in the necessary services from different sources; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Government fully recognise the importance of trust between patients and those caring for them. Under our proposals district health authorities will have a responsibility to ensure that the health care services available to their resident populations are comprehensive and of a high standard. Continuity of treatment will remain an important consideration. Contracts will specify periods of notice to ensure that any changes in the provision of services are introduced without disruption or inconvenience to patients.

Family Practitioner Committees

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospital referral rate per 1,000 of population for each family practitioner committee in England in the latest available year.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: This information is not currently available.

Electoral Registration Figures

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East of 4 April, why he does not propose to supply a pre-publication list of the electoral registration figures for the local government areas of England and Wales due to be published in an OPUS monitor (EL 89/1) at the end of April.

Mr. Freeman: The list of 1989 electorate figures for local authority areas is still being assembled by OPCS. It will be published as soon as possible after all information has been received from electoral registration officers and queries have been resolved.

Down's Syndrome

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give a breakdown by age of the mother of the numbers and rates of incidence of births of Down's syndrome babies in *(a)* the latest year for which figures are available and *(b)* 10 years previously.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table.

Figures are derived from a voluntary system of notification which collects information on cases reported at birth or up to seven days thereafter. It is, therefore, likely to be an incomplete measure of the total number of babies affected.

Number of babies born with Down's syndrome and rate per 10,000 births, by age of mother, England and Wales 1977 and 1987

Age of mother	Number	Rate
1977		
All ages	425	7·4
Under 20	28	5·1

Age of mother	*Number*	*Rate*
20-24	80	4·5
25-29	116	5·5
30-34	81	8·0
35-39	67	25·9
40-44	39	69·1
45+	7	149·6
Not stated	7	n/a
1987		
All ages	459	6·7
Under 20	33	5·7
20-24	71	3·7
25-29	118	4·9
30-34	107	7·8
35-39	89	19·0
40-44	35	42·7
45+	3	55·7
Not stated	3	n/a

n/a = Not available.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current incidence of Down's syndrome; and what it was *(a)* 10 years and *(b)* 20 years ago.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State what has been the incidence of Down's syndrome in newborn infants in *(a)* the latest year for which figures are available, *(b)* 10 years previously and *(c)* 20 years previously.

Mr. Freeman *[pursuant to his reply, 21 March, column 573]:* The answer omitted nine Down's syndrome cases for 1987 for which information was not reported as to their being live or still births. The correct table should therefore read:

Number of babies born with Down's syndrome and rate per 10,000 total and live births in England and Wales for 1967, 1977 and 1987

	All births		*Live births*	
Year	*Number*	*Rate*	*Number*	*Rate*
1967	613	7·3	594	7·1
1977	425	7·4	413	7·3
1987	459	6·7	443	6·5

Drug Budgets

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the savings to the National Health Service drugs bill from the introduction of indicative drug budgets.

Mr. Mellor: It is premature to try to determine the exact level of the savings.

Medical Secretaries

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to introduce a national grading system for medical secretaries.

Mr. Mellor: No. The pay and grading of administrative and clerical staff (including medical secretaries) are matters for negotiation in the Administrative and Clerical Staffs Whitley Council. The management side of the council has made proposals for a new grading structure for all staff in the group. Negotiations on these proposals and on the staff side's pay claim will continue when the joint negotiating committee of the council meets next on 12 April.

"Children in Danger Factfile"

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to deal with the problems identified in the National Children's Home publication, "Children in Danger Factfile 1989", a copy of which he has been sent.

Mr. Mellor: As the hon. Member may be aware, the factfile was launched on 21 March and is a detailed and wide-ranging document requiring careful consideration.

Pharmaceutical Wholesalers

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are made to inspect the premises of pharmaceutical wholesaling establishments in the United Kingdom who import from countries which are not a party to the pharmaceutical inspection convention.

Mr. Mellor: No special arrangements are made. All licensed wholesale dealers in imported medicinal products are regularly inspected by medicines inspectors.

Residential Homes (Mismanagement)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward proposals to prevent persons found guilty of mismanaging residential homes to go on caring for profit for up to three residents at a time.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on 23 February at column *793*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Residential Care

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy towards implementation of the recommendations made in the report by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, "Who Pays? Who Cares?" on the future funding of residential care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The report is being taken into account in the Government's consideration of the future arrangements for community care.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received following the publication by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations of "Who Pays? Who Cares?" on the future funding of residential care.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have received letters form Servite Houses Ltd., the Brendoncare Foundation, and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations itself, drawing attention to the report. Some individuals have also written in similar terms.

Social Fund

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of first instance social fund decisions are taken *(a)* after a home visit or *(b)* after the social fund officer has interviewed the claimant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The proportion of first instance social fund decisions cleared by visit is 1 per cent. The proportion cleared after interview is 25 per cent. Details of the number of applications processed are available in the Library.

Family Credit

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average award of family credit; and what was the average award of family income supplement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest information on family credit is derived from an examination of amounts in payment at the end of February 1989. This indicated that the average amount in payment at that time was around £25 per week. The latest information on family income supplement relates to June 1987 when the average was £15·28 per week.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many payments have been made under the cold weather payments scheme for each of the weeks in 1989 *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None.

Bed and Breakfast

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of people for whom bed and breakfast payments are being made in Doncaster and Mexborough; and whether they are *(a)* single, *(b)* single with children, *(c)* a couple or *(d)* a couple with children, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that the information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Injuries and Industrial Diseases

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing, for the most recent available date, the number of persons securing compensation for industrial diseases and injuries, analysed by percentage disability groupings.

Mr. Scott: At 2 April 1988, the provisional numbers of recipients of industrial injuries disablement pension, reduced earnings allowance or both were as shown in the table:

Assessed Disablement Per cent.	*Number (thousands)*
All percentages	262
Less than 20	103
20 to 24	64
25 to 34	46
35 to 44	22
45 to 54	11
55 to 64	7
65 to 74	3
75 to 84	2
85 to 94	1
95 to 100	4

Attendance Allowance (Halifax)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Halifax who have claimed attendance allowance are currently within the six-month waiting period.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the information is not available.

Household Incomes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing an estimate of the annual rise in living standards since 1980 for *(a)* non-pensioner couples with children, *(b)* non-pensioner couples without children, *(c)* non-pensioner single people, *(d)* non-pensioner single people with children, *(e)* single pensioners and *(f)* pensioner couples.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 15 March 1989]:* The available information is set out in the table.

Improvements in living standards percentage (individuals in households) 1979 to 1985 Great Britain

	1979 to 1981	*1981 to 1983*	*1983 to 1985*	*1979 to 1985*
Non-pensioner couples with children	−0·2	2·6	6·1	8·6
Non-pensioner couples without children	1·7	−1·5	5·7	5·9
Non-pensioner single people	4·8	−8·7	10·2	5·5
Non-pensioner single people with children	5·9	2·8	0·7	9·7
Single pensioners	7·3	6·2	1·1	15·2
Pensioner couples	5·8	5·7	2·9	15·1
All individuals	2·2	0·2	6·2	8·8

Notes:
1. Based on the methods and assumptions of "Households Below Average Income: 1981-85" copies of which are in the Library.
2. Improvements in living standards are measured by percentage changes in the real average household income of individuals (before housing costs). For further details see Cm. 523 "The Measurement of Living Standards For Households Below Average Income", November 1988.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Professional Liability

Mr. Heddle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to announce the conclusion of his Department's study to establish the nature, scope, extent and implications of professional liability problems.

Mr. Maude: I expect the report of the studies of professional liability problems to be submitted to me in the near future.

GATT

80. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on the recent negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Mr. Alan Clark: The trade negotiations committee of the GATT met in Geneva last week to deal with the four issues—agriculture, intellectual property, textiles and safeguards—left unresolved at its meeting in Montreal last December. The committee agreed frameworks of principles to guide further negotiation of these issues, and confirmed the agreements provisionally made in Montreal on the other 11 issues under negotiation in the Uruguay round.

On agriculture, the committee agreed that the long-term objective of the negotiation should be to work towards substantial and progressive reductions in agricultural support and protection sustained over an agreed period of time. It agreed to realise this objective through strengthened GATT rules and disciplines applicable to all contracting parties and extending to all measures affecting import access and export competition. It also agreed that developed countries would not exceed their current levels of domestic and export support and protection before the end of the round.

On the protection of intellectual property rights it agreed that the negotiations should cover effective enforcement, and dispute settlement, adequate standards, and the applicability of basic GATT principles. It confirmed that the negotiations on textiles and clothing should aim for a further general liberalisation of trade including progressive integration of this sector into the GATT on the basis of strengthened rules and disciplines. On the question of better safeguard arrangements to deal with sudden surges of imports the committee instructed negotiators to draw up a draft text for a comprehensive agreement.

These four agreements, and the confirmation of those made in Montreal on such important issues as services, tariffs and dispute settlement, provide a firm basis for the negotiation of substantial strengthening and extension of liberal and multilateral rules for trade by the conclusion of the round around the end of 1990. The Government will continue to work with our European Community partners to ensure an effective outcome to the negotiations which reflects United Kingdom priorities.

EC Committees (Chairmanship)

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many technical committees of the European Committee for Standardisation and of the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation are chaired by the United Kingdom, France and West Germany, respectively.

Mr. Forth: I am informed by BSI that the present position is as follows:

	United Kingdom	*France*	*Germany*
CEN secretariats and chairmanships	30	25	51
CENELEC secretariats	8	9	17
CENELEC chairmanships	9	13	5

Hearing Aid Council Act

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received concerning the reform of the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968.

Mr. Forth: My Department received a large number of representations from bodies about the Hearing Aid Council (Amendment) Bill sponsored by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). These bodies represent dispensers of hearing aids, consumers and those with specialised medical and audiological knowledge.

Price Indication (Code of Practice)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, further to his answer of 20 March, to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East, *Official Report*, column *429*, what is his estimate of the amount of time that will have to elapse before there is sufficient experience of the operation of the code of practice on price indication to enable an informed assessment on it to be made; and if he will make available in the Library the representations on the code which have been received since it came into operation on 1 March.

Mr. Forth: It would not be practicable to estimate when there will be sufficient experience of the operation of the code of practice for traders on price indications to enable an informed assessment of it to be made. However, as I said in my reply to the hon. Member on 20 March at column *249*, I have suggested that a committee should be set up to monitor the operation of the legislation and the working of the code. It is important, however, that sufficient time should elapse to allow the effectiveness of part III of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and the associated code of practice to be assessed before consideration is given to making any further changes.

I have no plans to make available in the Library the representations which have been received on the code since it came into operation on 1 March.

Arms Exports

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what information he has on the volume of arms export business with Libya conducted by Lonrho or its subsidiary company, Tradewinds plc.

Mr. Alan Clark *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on individual licensing matters. Licences are required for the export to all destinations, including Libya, of arms which are subject to control under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1987 (SI 1987 No. 2070), as amended.

Television Advertising

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the television advertising campaigns mounted by the Department of Trade and Industry in 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 and those to be mounted in 1989-90 giving the cost or estimated cost in each case.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The details are as follows:

1985-86 — None.
1986-87 — None.
1987-88 — Enterprise Initiative: £4·3 million.
Single European Market: £0·3 million.
1988-89[1] — Enterprise Initiative: £6·1 million.
Single European Market: £7·1 million.

[1] Provisional.

Allocations for 1989-90 have not been finalised.

Publicity Campaigns

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library details of each major publicity campaign mounted by the Department of Trade and Industry in 1985-86 and each succeeding year, including in each case the objects of the campaign, the intended audience and the outcome of the monitoring of the achievement of the intended objectives, together with a note of the intended objectives in the campaign to be mounted in 1989-90.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* I shall arrange for the information requested to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste

81. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the total volume per week of *(a)* domestic, *(b)* coal and *(c)* nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The amount of waste produced varies from week to week and year to year. The volume of waste produced may not be the same as that which is disposed of; some volumes may be reduced by compaction or incineration; others may be increased by solidification of liquids or stabilisation of reactive solids.

Approximate figures for the volume of domestic, coal and nuclear waste are as follows:

(a) Domestic (England and Wales)—120 million cu m per annum of loose waste or about 2,300,000 cu m per week (based on arisings of 18 million tonnes per annum and assuming a weight of 150 kgm per cu m).

(b) Coal (British Coal deep mined: England, Scotland and Wales)—25 million cu m per annum of non toxic material which is not a controlled waste under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

(c) Nuclear (United Kingdom)—46,050 cu m per annum of waste conditioned for safe storage or disposal (of which 30 cu m is high-level waste, 1,920 cu m intermediate level waste, and 44,100 cu m low-level waste), or about 886 cu m per week.

Hazardous Waste

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Copeland, 22 March, *Official Report*, column *651*, he will make a statement about the recent United Nations environment programme conference in Basle on the international trade and regulation of hazardous and toxic wastes.

Mr. Ridley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 5 April.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish a national register of contaminated land sites.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A Department of the Environment working party is currently examining the feasibility of compiling registers of contaminated land and their report is expected shortly. It would be unwise to pre-empt the recommendations of this working party.

Kirkgate Market (Compulsory Purchase Order)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to announce a decision in respect of *(a)* the City of Leeds (Kirkgate Market Area) Compulsory Purchase Order 1987 and *(b)* the City of Leeds (Kirkgate Market Area) Compulsory Purchase (No. 2) Order 1987, following the public inquiry held in April 1988.

Mr. Ridley: Decisions will be announced shortly.

Water Industries (EC and US)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the structure of the water industry in other European Community states and in the United States of America and the level of investment and consumer charges in each of these countries.

Mr. Howard: I would refer the hon. Member to table 13C of the 1988 edition of the water authorities publication, "Waterfacts", a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. Further information, on a consistent basis is not available.

Water Companies (Foreign Control)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards the acquisition of United Kingdom statutory water companies by foreign-domiciled companies; and if he will list which foreign companies have acquired majority or controlling interests in which United Kingdom statutory water companies since 1 January 1988.

Mr. Howard: The following foreign companies have acquired controlling interests in United Kingdom statutory water companies since 1 January 1988:

Foreign company	*Statutory water company*
Lyonnaise des Eaux	East Anglian
	Essex
	Newcastle and Gateshead
	Sunderland and South Shields
Generale des Eaux (through its subsidiary, General Utilities)	Folkestone and District
	Lee Valley
	North Surrey
	Tendring Hundred
SAUR	Eastbourne
	Mid Southern
	Mid-Sussex
	West Kent

We do not discriminate against foreign investment in the water industry. An important objective of privatisation is to enable English and Welsh water undertakers to compete with foreign companies in the world-wide market for water services. It would be contrary to our EC obligations to discriminate against investment by nationals of other member states.

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the percentage increases in water charges inforced by the statutory water companies since 1 January; which of these companies are French-owned; and which are owned by SAUR SA.

Mr. Howard: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave on 14 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) and to the reply that I gave today to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley).

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decision he has reached about the use of land for clay pigeon shooting without specific planning permission.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have considered carefully the responses to a consultation paper that we issued in December. They have concluded that the General Development Order 1988 should be amended to revert to 28 days permitted use of land for clay pigeon shooting. They propose to lay an amending order before the House today. In reaching their decision they have taken particular account of two arguments. First, the change from 28 to 14 days permitted use could result in less control and safety if shoots were to take place for 14 days on one piece of land and 14 days on another. Secondly, the Department has now concluded negotiations with the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association on a draft code of practice for clay pigeon shooting. This would apply to all clay pigeon shoots and would cover such matters as separation distances between shoots and noise sensitive premises, times of operation and sound reduction techniques. The draft code is now being issued for consultation. Subject to comments from consultees, when finalised it will be approved by my right hon. Friends under section 71 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Enterprise Zone (Sunderland)

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is now in a position to make an announcement about the designation of an enterprise zone for Sunderland.

Mr. Trippier: Statutory invitations under the terms of schedule 32 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, were issued today to Tyne and Wear Development Corporation and Sunderland borough council to prepare schemes with a view to designation as an enterprise zone of some 150 acres of land at Southwick Shipyard, Hylton Riverside, Castletown and Doxford Park. It is intended that the enterprise zone will last for 10 years from its designation. Copies of the invitations and maps showing the land specified are being placed in the Library of the House. The statutory procedures of consultation and then the hearing of representations will begin shortly.

Public Bodies (Appointments)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he gives to the possible conflict of interests when making appointments to public bodies responsible to his Department.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The question of possible conflicts of interest is always considered when appointments are being made. The Department generally follows the guidance for dealing with conflicts of interest on the part of board members set out in the HMSO publication "Non Departmental Public Bodies—A Guide for Departments".

Planning Decisions

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce a decision in respect of *(a)* the Hythe (Kent) marina and *(b)* the implementation of the revocation procedure in respect of the irregular granting of ancient monument consent for the destruction of the eastern end of the Royal military canal.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* I hope to write to the parties about these matters soon.

River Teign (Pollution)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received about the level of sewage pumped into the River Teign; and what response he has made;

(2) what information he has on the level of untreated and partly treated sewage pumped into the River Teign;

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that the River Teign is protected from pollution by sewage.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* Information is not held by the Department in a form which would allow the identification of discharges in any particular area. Details of all consents granted a water authority are, however, held on the register maintained by the water authority which may be inspected free of charge at all reasonable hours.

The only representations that my right hon. Friend has received concerning sewage disposal to the River Teign were submitted in response to the statutory advertising of a discharge consent application made by the South West water authority under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 for the repositioning of the sewage outfall at Shaldon occasioned by the blockage of the existing one by shifting sand. Consent was granted to this discharge on 29 November 1988.

The only discharges of untreated sewage to inland waters are from storm and emergency overflows. By definition, the operation of these is intermittent and thus conditions imposed reflect this and prescribe when a discharge may take place.

Many existing discharges to estuarial waters are of crude sewage or screened or macerated sewage and are of long standing. These discharges have deemed consent. It is the Department's intention that each should be reviewed by 1992 and where necessary, alternative arrangements considered.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution issued guidelines on the environmental conditions new long sea outfalls should be designed to achieve. Copies of these guidelines have been placed in the Library of the House.

Boundary Commission

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any requests made to him for county council boundary reviews that involve the abolition of any county councils, other than Humberside; and if he will state his criteria for instructing the Local Government Boundary Commission to consider the abolition of any county councils as part of their reviews.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Since the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has a statutory duty to consider the abolition of counties when carrying out its periodic review of county boundaries, I do not keep records of any requests that I receive for this to be done and I do not have criteria for instructing it to consider that question.

It was in view of the scale and strength of the representations that I received on the report of the Boundary Commission in which it concluded that, on the guidelines that it had been given, it could not recommend major change in the case of Humberside, that I decided to direct it to carry out a further review of that county without the limitation that it should propose the abolition of a principal area only where present arrangements clearly fail to provide effective and convenient local government.

Rating Reform

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of *(a)* the responses he has had to his request to charging authorities for a progress report on implementing the community charge, *(b)* when he proposes to publish the responses to his Department's request for a progress report from local authorities on implementing the community charge, *(c)* whether the Department of Environment has any plans to undertake further surveys of local authorities in connection with implementation of the community charge, and *(d)* whether any future surveys of local authorities will ask them for information concerning the costs incurred by them in implementing the community charge.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* I have today placed in the Library a summary of progress on the implementation of the community charge. It is based on the responses from chief finance officers to the letter sent to them on 21 December 1988.

The survey reveals an encouraging picture overall. All of the 90 per cent. of authorities which have responded to the letter so far have made plans for the implementation of the community charge, and the majority of these appear to be making good progress with their arrangements.

I intend to issue a detailed questionnaire to all charging authorities later this month. The main purpose will be to obtain details of the implementation programme for each authority. I do not intend that this questionnaire should seek information about the cost of implementation.

Homelessness

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are currently registered homeless in *(a)* Warrington, *(b)* Macclesfield, *(c)* Congleton, *(d)* Crewe and Nantwich, *(e)* Vale Royal and *(f)* Staffordshire, Moorlands; and how many people were registered homeless in March 1979 in the same districts.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The numbers of households accepted as homeless by each English local authority under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 in the first six months of 1979 appear in table A of "Homeless households reported by local authorities in England: Statistics for first half of 1979."

Latest estimates appear in table 7 of the regular quarterly publication "Local authorities' action under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Results for the fourth quarter of 1988. Supplementary Tables."

All these publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since its establishment the planned housing developments *(a)* the Wirral side and *(b)* the Liverpool side of the Merseyside development corporation area; and what progress has been made on the completion of these plans.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Since the MDC was established in 1981, the corporation has intended that land would be made available for housing in its designated area. No figures were put on the annual number of dwellings planned and the following information records those completed or under construction in the period up to 1988-89. From 1989 to 1994 land zoned for housing development will provide for approximately 1330 dwellings in the MDC area (1,237 in Liverpool and 97 in Wirral). These will be provided by the private sector and housing associations, mainly on land reclaimed and serviced by the MDC.

Dwellings Completed or Under Construction

	Liverpool	*Wirral*
1981-84	8	Nil
1984-85	100	Nil
1985-86	19	Nil
1986-87	32	[1]20
1987-88	11	Nil
1988-89	305	Nil

[1] A 20-bed single persons hostel was opened in December 1986.

Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham North East of 16 March, *Official Report*, column 315, if he will list the several employment and training co-ordinating groups which have been set up in docklands; and if he will list their membership.

Mr. Trippier: The co-ordinating groups which have been set up are listed below, together with the organisations which attend. In addition there are regular contacts at working level.

Joint LDDC/Bishop of Stepney Docklands Wide Group:

—Bishop of Stepney, the Roman Catholic Bishop of East London, East London Church Leaders Group, LDDC, ILEA, LB Tower Hamlets, LB Southwark, LB Newham, Department of Employment (Training Agency, Employment Service and Docklands Liaison Group), Department of the Environment, LENTA, Docklands Forum, Skillnet.

Tower Hamlets Education Employment and Training Co-ordination Group:

—LB Tower Hamlets, LDDC, Department of Employment, Department of the Environment, Department of Education and Science, ILEA, New Start, Olympia and York, CITB.

Southwark Employment and Training Co-ordination Group:

—LB Southwark, LDDC, Department of Employment, Department of the Environment, North Peckham Task Force.

LDDC has offered to set up similar new arrangements in

Newham.

For the time being LDDC and the borough are continuing to liaise closely through existing arrangements.

Industrial Pollution Control

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what responses he has received to his consultation document on a new system of industrial pollution control for industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[pursuant to her reply 28 February, Official Report, c. 110]:* Our proposals for controlling inputs of the most dangerous substances to water—the "Red List"—were published last July. We have received responses from 80 organisations and individuals. A list of these has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. There was very widespread support for our proposals and it is now our intention to implement them. This will provide the regulatory framework for cleaning up our rivers, and for meeting our international obligations including those on cleaning up the North sea. It puts us in the forefront of developments in Europe in this area.

Comments were sought and received on a number of points of detail, and these have been taken into account in reaching conclusions.

We announced on 28 February (*Official Report*, column *110*) our intention to proceed with the proposal that discharges from prescribed processes should be controlled by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) under the proposed new arrangements for integrated pollution control. Such discharges would be subject to a requirement, to be introduced progressively for existing plant, that the process should be operated according to the best available technology not entailing excessive costs with a view to minimising discharges of the most dangerous substances. However, discharge consents would also have to ensure that strict environmental quality standards were met and maintained in the receiving waters, and the proposed National Rivers Authority would have to be satisfied that this was the case before consent could be granted by HMIP.

An important part of our proposals, welcomed by many respondents, was the establishment of a priority "Red List" of dangerous substances. As a result of consultation and of some new and corrected data received, we have slightly amended the provisional "Red List" set out in the consultation paper. The initial priority "Red List" will comprise the following substances:

Substance	*CAS number*
Mercury and its compounds	
Cadmium and its compounds	
Gamma-hexachlorocyclohexane	00058-89-9
DDT	00050-29-3
Pentachlorophenol	00087-86-5
Hexachlorobenzene	00118-74-1
Hexachlorobutadiene	00087-68-3
Aldrin	003090-00-2
Dieldrin	00060-57-1
Endrin	00072-20-8
Polychlorinated Biphenyls	01336-36-3
Dichlorvos	00062-73-7
1,2-Dichloroethane	00107-06-2
Trichlorobenzene	12002-48-1
Altrazine	01912-24-9
Simazine	00122-34-9
Tributyltin compounds	
Triphenyltin compounds	
Trifluralin	001582-09-8
Fenitrothion	00122-14-5
Azinphos-methyl	00086-50-0
Malathion	00121-75-5
Endosulfan	00115-29-7

Further substances may be added to the list from time to time where there are sound scientific reasons for doing so. These will be identified broadly along the lines set down in the annex to the consultation paper. The selection scheme is being further developed and modified in the light of the comments received. Candidates substances identified by the scheme will be subject to a second-stage assessment, taking particular account of the risk posed for the aquatic environment, and to consultation before addition to the list.

Many respondents confirmed the view expressed in the consultation paper that diffuse sources constitute an important input for many dangerous substances and that these merit greater attention. In the light of comments received we remain of the view that existing powers and arrangements for controlling the supply, use and disposal of substances should be sufficient to deal with any potential pollution problem from diffuse sources, but this position will remain under review. In the meantime, we have initiated more widespread environmental monitoring for priority substances and will consider the need for specific action where this proves necessary case by case.

The consultation document also referred to earlier proposals issued by my Department for controlling discharges to sewer of the most dangerous substances after privatisation of the water authorities. There we have concluded that the Secretary of State, advised by HMIP, should authorise the discharge of these substances to sewer. However, dischargers need only make a single application to the sewage undertaker, who will refer any aspects involving dangerous substances to the Secretary of State. These arrangements are reflected in the Water Bill currently before Parliament, and regulations would be made under proposed powers in that Bill to prescribe the substances or processes to which they would apply.

The full application of technology-based emission standards to discharges from prescribed processes under a system of integrated pollution control will require new legislation, which will be introduced at the earliest opportunity. However, provisions included in the Water Bill currently before Parliament would enable such controls to be introduced before then on an interim basis. We will make further announcements about this in due course.

In the meantime the Department, together with the Welsh Office, has today issued a circular (DOE circular 7/89, Welsh Office circular 16/89) revising and extending existing guidance on the implementation of EC Directives concerning the discharge of dangerous substances into the aquatic environment. The circular includes environmental quality standards for a number of new list I and list II dangerous substances.

TRANSPORT

Double Decker Buses

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new double decker buses London Regional Transport has bought in each of the last five years.

Mr. Portillo: That is a matter for London Regional Transport's operating subsidiary, London Buses Ltd.

London Regional Transport

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the salaries and expenses of the board members of London Regional Transport.

Mr. Portillo: Current annual salaries of the board members of London Regional Transport are as follows:

	Salary	*Time Commitment*
	£	
Chairman		
Mr. Wilfrid Newton	80,000	Full time
Full-time Members		
Mr. John Telford-Beasley	60,000	Full time
Mr. Michael Marsh	60,000	Full time
Part-time Members		
Sir Neil Shields	18,900	2 days per week
Mr. Oscar Roith	9,450	1 day per week
Mr. Keith Brown	5,775	half day per week
Dr. Stephen Glaister	5,775	half day per week
Mrs. Helen Robinson	5,775	half day per week
Miss Patricia Steel	5,775	half day per week
Mr. Roy Thomas	5,775	half day per week

Members' expenses are a matter for London Regional Transport.

Dial-a-Ride

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much each local transport authority spent on its dial-a-ride services in 1987 and 1988; and what was the average number of journeys for each authority.

Mr. Portillo: I regret that the information requested is not readily available.

Unleaded Petrol

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider making conversion of an engine to run on unleaded petrol compulsory as part of the MOT test.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Where cars are convertible we are encouraging owners to have this done right away. There are now significant tax advantages. From October 1990 all new petrol engined vehicles must be capable of running on unleaded petrol.

Legislation leaves the choice with owners so compulsion would be impracticable. Some cars—especially older ones—cannot be converted to unleaded running.

Road Tax Offences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorists have been charged with driving without a road fund tax following the recent campaigns by his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The 20 vehicle excise duty enforcement campaigns run by the Department in conjunction with police forces in England and Scotland during 1988 resulted in 12,000 motorists being reported for not having a valid tax disc.

Some 8,000 of these have already been prosecuted and many more cases will be dealt with by the courts in the coming months.

Accident Statistics

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road traffic accidents in *(a)* Suffolk, *(b)* Norfolk and *(c)* England were attributed to (i) roads requiring remedial works, (ii) alcohol, (iii) criminal driving and (iv) others in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The STATS 19 return made to the Department of Transport does not record the causes of road accidents; it is therefore not possible to provide information on the number of accidents attributable to a particular factor.

Information is available on the number of accidents in which a driver or rider failed a breath test, and this is shown in the table, along with the total number of accidents for 1987, the latest year for which these figures are available.

Total accidents and those in which a driver or rider failed the breath test
Norfolk, Suffolk, England—1987

	Failed breath test	*Total*
Norfolk	155	3,403
Suffolk	136	2,715
Rest of England	9,041	203,788
England	9,332	209,906

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the total fatalities in motor vehicle accidents in *(a)* Suffolk, *(b)* Norfolk and *(c)* England every year from 1979 to the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The figures are as follows:

Fatalities in motor vehicle and road accidents in Norfolk, Suffolk and England from 1979 to 1987
Number of fatalities

	Norfolk	*Suffolk*	*Rest of England*	*England*
1979	97	76	4,630	4,803
1980	72	72	4,465	4,609
1981	81	63	4,360	4,504
1982	79	60	4,416	4,555
1983	74	58	4,099	4,231
1984	99	71	4,208	4,378
1985	75	67	3,856	3,998
1986	85	53	4,006	4,144
1987	88	58	3,835	3,981

Noise Standards

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the policy of his Department with regard to acceptable noise standards in areas adjacent to major new rail and road projects; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will accept the noise standard of 65 dba for compensation purposes for the Docklands Railway Extension Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Noise insulation standards for new road schemes are laid down in the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975, made under part II of the Land Compensation Act 1973. Because major new rail schemes have been comparatively rare, no regulations have ever been made laying down noise insulation standards for such schemes. However, I am now setting in hand the work necessary to establish a national noise insulation standard for new railway construction. The objective will be to establish the standard at a level which equitably relates to the standard set by regulation for new highways.

In connection with their proposal for a new rail link to the Channel tunnel, British Rail is offering to provide noise insulation on a similar basis to the scheme which operates in respect of new roads if noise resulting from the new link exceeds 70 dB(A) on the 24 hour Leq noise index. BR consider, on the basis of advice from independent experts, that this level is equivalent to the level at which insulation is provided for properties affected by new road schemes. LRT have also taken independent expert advice and share this view.

Before promulgating any national standards for railway noise, the Government would wish to take its own independent view, and consult other interested parties on the appropriate standard to be adopted. We are therefore not yet in a position to take a view on the appropriateness of any particular noise standard, including that now proposed for the Docklands railway extension.

Seat Belts

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any representations concerning exemption of children from the Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Rear Seat Belts by Children) Act 1988, where the available seat belts are being used by adult passengers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Responses so far favour exempting children where the available seat belts are being used by adults.

This issue is discussed in our consultation document, "Rear Seat Belt Wearing by Children". Comments are invited by 2 May.

Where belts exist they should be used, either by children or adults. Seat belt wearing saves lives.

No responsible parent should wait for the law before properly restraining their children in the car.

Taxis

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider, as part of his review of the operation of taxi services, the abolition of the power of local authorities to restrict the number of taxis which might be operated in their area.

Mr. Portillo: Yes.

Railways (Privatisation)

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the number of private national railways operated in different parts of the world and moves being made by national Governments to privatise existing state-owned railway networks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am aware of privately owned railways in the United States of America and Canada, and of the privatisation process in Japan. These and other relevant international comparisons will be taken into account in our consideration of the case for privatising British Rail.

Pollution (Alaska)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance the marine pollution control unit is offering the authorities in Alaska; if he will list the United Kingdom equipment available to assist in cleaning up this disaster; if the Frogmat has been brought to the Alaskan authorities' attention; and if he will make a statement on the use of dispersants.

Mr. Portillo: The marine pollution control unit's resources exist to deal with oil spills around United Kingdom coasts. Some of these can be offered to assist neighbouring European states under an agreement for co-operation in dealing with pollution of the North sea by oil (the Bonn agreement). Assistance is not normally offered to an authority as far away as Alaska since to do so would reduce unacceptably our ability to respond to any incident at home. Any request for assistance from the Alaskan authorities would nevertheless by sympathetically considered. The United Kingdom developer of Frogmat has advised the marine pollution control unit that he has brought his product to the attention of the Alaskan authorities. The use of dispersants for dealing with oil spills is a well proved method, but their effectiveness depends on the type of oil, how quickly they can be applied, and the weather conditions.

Channel Tunnel (Irish Link)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what decision has been made by the Irish and British Governments, on a Belfast-Dublin-Dun Laoghaire-Holyhead link to the Channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The planning of rail services in the United Kingdom is the responsiility of British Rail and Northern Ireland railways. Under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, British Rail is required to publish a plan by the end of 1989 setting out its proposals for Channel tunnel rail services serving various parts of the United Kingdom. It has not yet completed the regional consultations which it is undertaking in preparation for this plan.

Thermal Neutron Analysis Machines

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will consider the encouragement of research and experimentation into thermal neutron analysis machines to detect Semtex.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: As explained to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 8 March at

column *538*, research and development work on this technique is being funded by a commercial organisation in the private sector under a contract with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's Harwell laboratory.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has assessed the efficiency of the recently produced thermal neutron analysis machines; whether he intends to introduce them at British airports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I refer to my reply to the question by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) on 27 February at columns *55-6*.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with British Rail about the surcharging of charter trains using the Settle-Carlisle railway line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Decisions on the level of fares and charges are entirely a matter for BR's commercial judgment.

New Drivers

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the Transport and Road Research Laboratory's current study into the performance and behaviour of new drivers will also include research into the experience of other countries including Australia.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The current study is confined to United Kingdom drivers.

A specific study of new driver experience in other countries is not included in TRRL's research programme. We do keep in touch with relevant overseas research.

A423 (Compulsory Purchases)

Dr. Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the necessary compulsory purchases will be completed in relation to the A423 west of Maidenhead-Oxford trunk road (Maidenhead Thicket-Burchetts Green section) and work on the road able to commence.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Most of the land required for this scheme is covered by made compulsory purchase orders. An order for the remaining small area will be made shortly. Advance works for cable diversions at Maidenhead Thicket are in progress. The road works are programmed to start in the summer of next year.

Public Service Obligation

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the PSO grant cash ceiling will be for 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: The cash ceiling on PSO grant for 1989-90 will be £496 million.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 April 1989

HOME DEPARTMENT

Electoral Boundaries (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the timetable for the redrawing of ward and constituency boundaries in Liverpool.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no immediate plans to review either the ward or constituency boundaries of Liverpool. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England will review the city's external boundaries in its mandatory review of metropolitan district boundaries, due for completion in 1992. The Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England will review the boundaries of constituencies in Liverpool in its general review of constituencies in England, provisionally due to start in 1991.

Members (Prison Visits)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures that an hon. Member needs to follow when seeking to visit a constituent detained in one of Her Majesty's prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: He or she should contact the governor of the prison, who will normally issue a special visiting order admitting the hon. or right hon. Member to the prison.

Correspondence

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Newham, North-East dated 6 March on Paul Higgins.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A reply was sent on 6 April to the hon. Member concerning Mr. Higgins' appeal. A further letter will be sent to the hon. Member as soon as inquiries about Mr. Higgins' treatment in custody have been completed.

Safer Cities Programme

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria by which London boroughs are selected for the safer cities programme.

Mr. John Patten: The criteria used to select safer cities initiatives are that an area must (i) be an urban programme area; (ii) have a high crime rate; (iii) be targeted for Government action and (iv) be willing to participate in the safer cities programme. These criteria apply to all areas selected for inclusion in the programme including the London boroughs.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to have included in future reports made under section 8 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985, details of the number of interceptions made on telephones belonging to *(a)* hon. and right hon. Members, *(b)* leaders of trades unions and *(c)* elected representatives of public bodies.

Mr. Hurd: The annex to the report for 1988 of the commissioner appointed under section 8 of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 gave the information concerning the number of warrants issued which the commissioner judged could be published without harming national security. I see no reason to take a different view or to depart from the established policy of successive Governments of not commenting on allegations relating to the interception of communications. The commissioner said in his report he was satisfied from his examination of cases that the issuing of the warrant in each case was justified on one or more of the grounds set out in section 2(2) of the 1985 Act. With regard to allegations of the interception of the telephones of Members of Parliament, the position remains as set out by the then Prime Minister the Lord Wilson of Rievaulx on 17 November 1966 at columns 634-41 and reaffirmed since by successive Governments

Basildon (Crime Statistics)

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Home Department what are the latest crime figures for Basildon and for the same period in each of the last four years.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is published annually in the report of the chief constable of the Essex police and is given in the following table.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police in Basildon

Year	*Number of offences*
1984	11,410
1985	10,534
1986	13,581
1987	13,717
1988	12,546

Arson

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to support the proposed formation of the arson bureau, which was recommended in the Home Office standing conference on crime prevention report "The Prevention of Arson"; what steps have been taken to date; and when the bureau is likely to be running.

Mr. John Patten: I believe that such a bureau might make a useful reduction in the problems of arson. It will first be necessary to develop the working party's proposals to see whether a precise basis for an arson bureau can be established which is acceptable to the Government, the insurers and to the business community. Discussions for that purpose are in hand.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons prisoners Ella O'Dwyer and Martina Anderson, in H-wing of Durham prison, were locked up under rule 43 on 4 March; and for how long.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Ms. Ella O'Dwyer and Ms. Martina Anderson were removed from normal association with other inmates in the wing for a period of two weeks in the interests of good order and discipline. The authority under prison rule 43 was given by a member of the board of visitors.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what complaint mechanisms there are for prisoners who consider their living conditions to be intolerable.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Prisoners may raise complaints informally with members of the prison staff, but there is a provision under the prison rules for them to see on request the governor, a visiting officer of the Secretary of State, or a member of the board of visitors on any matter. They may also petition the Secretary of State, Parliament or the Queen, write to their Member of Parliament (who may refer a complaint to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration), the European Commissioner for Human Rights, or seek redress through the courts.

Deportation

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were removed under deportation powers in 1987 and 1988; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: A total of 1,388 persons were removed under the deportation powers in 1988, a 50 per cent. increase on the 923 removed in 1987. While the number of deportation orders enforced in the two years was much the same (776 in 1987 and 745 in 1988), the numbers of supervised departures increased very substantially from 147 in 1987 to 643 in 1988. This increase occurred among those removed under section 3(5)(a) of the Immigration Act 1971 for overstaying or working in breach of their conditions. It reflects the combined impact of more effective administrative arrangements introduced on 1 August 1988 and the provisions in the Immigration Act 1988 which restricted the appeal rights of those who had been here for less than seven years to matters of fact and which also provided authority to meet the cost of all supervised departures.

The increases in the figures reflect the Government's determination to make every effort to deal quickly and effectively with those who offend against the immigration laws. As was announced when the Government's expenditure plans were published, we intend to increase the resources devoted to enforcement of the immigration laws over the next three years.

More detailed figures on those removed under the enforcement powers, covering illegal entrants as well as those removed under the deportation process, were published in "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1988" (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 10/89), a copy of which is in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Kircindeep Singh

Mr. Bidwell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is yet in a position to write to the hon. Member for Ealing, Southall concerning the immigration case of Kircindeep Singh in India, mentioned by the Minister of State, Home Office as having been referred to him in a letter dated 6 March.

Mr. Eggar: A reply was sent to the hon. Gentleman on 6 April 1989.

Kampuchea

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be willing to offer British personnel for an international control mission to monitor a Kampuchean settlement.

Mr. Eggar: It is too soon to say what sort of international presence may be required in the event of a Cambodian settlement, and, hence, the nature of a possible British contribution.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he has expressed concern to Prince Sihanouk over the prince's proposal to bring Khmer Rouge troops back into Kampuchea in the context of a settlement;

(2) with which members of the Khmer Rouge leadership Her Majesty's Government are prepared to deal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have no dealings with the Khmer Rouge leadership. Prince Sihanouk has proposed the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge, but excluding Pol Pot, in an interim Government. If some Khmer Rouge involvement proved acceptable to the Cambodian factions, we would not oppose it, though it is clear that neither Pol Pot himself nor his cronies have any place in a peaceful settlement.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to offer full support for Prince Sihanouk should the prince seek to negotiate with Premier Hun Sen on the basis of backing from the West.

Mr. Eggar: We have made it clear on many occasions that we fully support Prince Sihanouk's efforts to bring about a peaceful and durable settlement in Cambodia.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the subject of Kampuchea with Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Deng Xiao Ping in advance of their Sino-Soviet summit in May emphasising Her Majesty's Government's concern over the threat to a peaceful settlement posed by the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Eggar: Cambodia was one of many issues touched on during Mr. Gorbachev's visit to Britain on 5-7 April. We keep in close touch with the Soviet and Chinese Governments on this subject.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will propose an amendment to the United Nations' resolution on Kampuchea naming the leadership of the Khmer Rouge as being unfit ever to govern Kampuchea again.

Mr. Eggar: The terms of any future United Nations resolution on Cambodia will depend on developments. I hope that, by the next session of the General Assembly, Vietnam will have withdrawn completely from its illegal occupation, as called for in successive General Assembly resolutions.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the European Council of Ministers last discussed the future of Kampuchea; what issues were raised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Cambodia is regularly discussed in the context of political co-operation amongst the Twelve. The Twelve support efforts to restore an independent, democratic, neutral and non-aligned Cambodia, and call for early and unconditional Vietnamese withdrawal.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support the United Kingdom has given to the Kampuchea peace talks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have supported the efforts of Prince Sihanouk and the ASEAN, as well as the two Jakarta informal meetings and talks between the factions in France and elsewhere. We have raised the issue among the five permanent members of the Security Council. With our EC partners we have issued several statements.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), *Official Report*, 8 March, column *877*, that he has placed the matter of Kampuchea on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council, if he will now take the issue forward as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Eggar: As my right hon. and learned Friend stated in his reply, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council will carry forward discussion of Cambodia when they feel it is appropriate.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Thai Government about the future of Khmer Rouge soldiers based in camps on the Thai/Kampuchea border and how the Thais propose to disarm and neutralise the threat of the Khmer Rouge army to peace and development in both Kampuchea and Thailand.

Mr. Eggar: We regularly discuss the Cambodian problem with Thailand (and other members of the Association of South East Asian Nations). We believe that the only framework for removing any threat from Khmer Rouge forces is a peaceful political settlement.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate proposals at the United Nations for the Kampuchean refugees in camps in Thailand to be given refugee status and the protection and rights afforded to refugees.

Mr. Eggar: These Cambodians are in Thailand as a result of Vietnam's occupation of their country. We hope that they will soon be able to return in safety. The question of refugee status for any individual in Thailand is a matter for the Thai authorities.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate proposals to extend United Nation's protection in the Kampuchean refugee camps in Thailand to ensure that those wishing to leave camps controlled by the Khmer Rouge may do so safely.

Mr. Eggar: We have taken a leading role with the Thai Government and the relevant United Nations agencies in securing proper access by United Nations personnel to Khmer Rouge-controlled camps. The Thai Government do not allow displaced persons in any of the Cambodian camps to leave them freely.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will hold talks with representatives of the People's Republic of Kampuchea;

(2) if, following the recent establishment by the Government of Thailand and the Government of Kampuchea of a joint committee to oversee economic co-operation, he will send a delegation to Kampuchea to discuss future aid, trade and commercial links between the United Kingdom and Kampuchea.

Mr. Eggar: We have no plans at present to alter our policy towards the so-called People's Republic of Kampuchea.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, following Prince Sihanouk's recent statement that the coalition Government of democratic Kampuchea is dominated by the Khmer Rouge, he will seek to have CGDK removed from the United Nations where they occupy a seat.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) on 5 December 1988 at column *40*.

Human Rights

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent by the Government since 1979 in fighting cases before the European Court of Human Rights up to, and including the hearing of 28 March; how much has been paid for the instruction of lawyers; what are the estimated costs in employees' time, travelling and accommodation costs of officials involved in these cases; how much has been paid out in costs or expenses and compensation by the Government following rulings by the court; and if he will list the sums involved in each case which has reached a ruling stage.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is given in the accompanying table.

It is not the practice to publish fees paid to individual counsel in specific cases. The total Government legal costs incurred to date in relation to the 24 cases before the court between 1979 and 28 March 1989 is approximately £215,000.

It is not possible to estimate the costs in respect of officials' time, travel and accommodation for each of these cases.

Case	*Compensation paid to the applicant/s* £	*Costs and expenses paid to the applicant/s (Including proceedings prior to those before the Court)* £
Sunday Times	—	22,626·78
Young, James & Webster	74,917·00	61,774·00
Dudgeon	—	3,315·00
X	—	64,811·11
Campbell & Cosans	3,000·00	9,577·13
Silver & Others	—	33,066·59
Campbell & Fell	—	13,000·00

Case	Compensation paid to the applicant/s	Costs and expenses paid to the applicant/s (Including proceedings prior to those before the Court)
	£	£
Malone	—	3,744·10
Ashingdane	—	—
Abdulaziz, Cabales & Balkandali	[1]—	32,000·00
James & Others	—	—
Lithgow & Others	—	—
Rees	—	—
Gillow[2]	10,735·00	2,134·00
Weeks	8,000·00	1,793·33
AGOSI	—	—
Monnel & Morris	—	—
Boyle & Rice	—	3,450·00
O	5,000·00	9,235·25
H	12,000·00	4,966·55
W	12,000·00	28,246·94
B	12,000·00	12,075·00
R	8,000·00	6,229·50
Brogan	[3]	

[1] Approximate.
[2] These sums were reimbursed by the Government of Guernsey.
[3] Judgment awaited.

NATIONAL FINANCE

714 Certificates

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many section 714 certificates have been issued to the self-employed in each of the last five years; and how many of these have been issued to persons already engaged in full-time employment paying income tax through the PAYE system.

Mr. Lawson: There are several types of 714 exemption certificate. 714I and 714S certificates are issued only to self-employed individuals. 714P certificates are issued to partnerships and companies but it is not possible to say how many are issued to each category.

The numbers of certificates issued, including renewals, in each of the last five years are:

Year	*714I & S*	*714P*
1984-85	149,410	29,877
1985-86	164,856	31,986
1986-87	167,316	32,627
1987-88	180,562	32,074
[1]1988-89	187,994	34,509

[1] to 29 March 1989.

There is no record of issues to persons already engaged in full-time employment taxed through the PAYE system.

Whisky (Excise Duty)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish *(a)* the annual amount of revenue accruing to the Exchequer in real terms from the levying of excise duty on Scotch whisky and *(b)* the proportion of excise duty which has arisen from whisky production in Speyside, in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lilley: During 1987-88 an estimated £0·7 billion accrued to the Exchequer from clearances to the home market of whisky produced in the United Kingdom. This figure includes a small amount attributable to production outside Scotland. An estimate is not available of the proportion of the tax borne by production in Speyside.

Third World Debt

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government support the initiative by United States Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady to provide debt relief to major Third world debtors.

Mr. Lilley: The United Kingdom welcomes the recognition that the next phase of the debt strategy can give greater emphasis to debt reduction. It believes that this should not require a transfer of risk from the private to the public sector.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action Her Majesty's Government intend to take, in support of the Brady initiative, to persuade British banks to reduce the debt and the debt service of major Third world debtors.

Mr. Lilley: The interim committee of the IMF encouraged the Governments of creditor countries to review the extent to which tax, regulatory and accounting systems might unnecessarily constrain the participation of commercial banks in debt reduction. It does not appear that such obstacles arise in the United Kingdom, but the United Kingdom has agreed to review its policies in these areas. G7 Ministers agreed that concrete negotiations on debt and debt service reduction are a matter for the debtor countries and the commercial banks.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government will support a United States initiative to increase the resources of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank so that greater debt relief can be provided for major Third world debtors.

Mr. Lilley: Secretary Brady has not proposed that the resources of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank should be increased. A general capital increase at the World Bank of $74·8 billion was agreed in February 1988. The United Kingdom share was $3·7 billion. The interim committee has asked the executive board of the IMF to complete its work on the ninth review of quotas with a view to a decision by the board of governors before the end of this year.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, following the International Monetary Fund riots in Venezuela, whether it remains the Government's policy only to assist major Third world debtors who comply strictly with International Monetary Fund adjustment policies.

Mr. Lilley: The United Kingdom fully supports the internationally agreed strategy for middle-income debtors which involves the adoption by debtors of appropriate strong adjustment policies supported by the IMF and World Bank in conjunction with the provision of finance by creditors. Economic reform is vital to this process, which aims to restore growth and creditworthiness. The United Kingdom is playing an important role through its financial support to the international financial institutions, through Paris Club reschedulings and the provision of new export credits, and by maintaining and encouraging an open trading system and a favourable world economic environment.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when Her Majesty's Government anticipate that positive flows of resources to the major Third world debtors will be resumed.

Mr. Lilley: Future resource flows to the major Third world debtors will depend in large part on the efforts of the countries themselves to repatriate flight capital and attract inward direct investment. The OECD estimates that in 1987 net resource flows to developing countries as a whole less net investment income paid by these countries were positive by $30 billion.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on what percentage of the pre-tax profits of British banks was accounted for by debt servicing and repayments by major Third world borrowers in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lilley: Data are not collected centrally in the form requested.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the balance of payments deficit as a percentage of gross domestic product in *(a)* 1974 and *(b)* 1988.

Mr. Major: The current account deficit on the balance of payments was equivalent to 3·8 per cent. of GDP in 1974. In 1988 the deficit was equivalent to 3·2 per cent. of GDP.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Capital Investment

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the level of capital investment in each year since 1979 in constant prices in *(a)* schools, *(b)* polytechnics, *(c)* universities.

Mr. Jackson: The information available is as follows:

£000 (1979 Prices)

Capital expenditure on Maintained Schools, Voluntary Aided and Special Agreement Schools, Polytechnics and Universities.

	Schools			
	Maintained	*Voluntary Aided*	*Polytechnics*	*Universities*
1979-80	258,155	n/a	19,480	153,800
1980-81	292,157	n/a	28,553	144,600
1981-82	200,860	n/a	24,128	138,800
1982-83	184,650	n/a	24,675	134,300
1983-84	186,021	13,144	20,754	123,900
1984-85	188,215	16,272	20,633	122,200
1985-86	189,164	19,381	23,501	128,300
1986-87	192,245	16,338	23,003	136,700
1987-88	[1]	18,184	[1]	128,800
1988-89	[1]	22,955	[1]	130,600

[1] Not yet available.

The figures above relate to capital expenditure on schools and polytechnics in England whereas the universities figures are for Great Britain and apply to grants made on the advice of the University Grants Committee. Universities also have access to capital funding from other Government Departments, research councils and their own private funds, but such expenditure cannot be separately identified.

The figures for voluntary aided and special agreement schools show the total value for grant aided capital expenditure, including the governors' contribution of 15 per cent. Figures for the years prior to 1983-84 are not readily available.

St. Anne's Primary School, Worksop

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why his department did not approve additional expenditure on St. Anne's primary school, Worksop, as requested by the governors and the Southwell diocesan education committee and Nottingham county council, in their submission to him on 14 September 1988.

Mr. Butcher: It was not possible to provide an allocation for this school from the limited resources available because, under the Department's well-publicised criteria, it had a lower priority than the approved statutory proposals for other schools in south Worksop.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he intends to take to reduce the split-site operation of St. Anne's primary school, Worksop.

Mr. Butcher: It is for the diocese and governors, in consultation with the Nottinghamshire LEA, to decide on priorities for improving educational facilities at this school. Should a scheme to unite the school on one site be submitted with the authority's plans for 1990-91 we shall give it most careful consideration in accordance with the criteria that we apply to all similar proposals.

Aided Schools

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why his Department refuses to give priority to capital allocation for projects carried out by governors of aided schools unless they are for basic need in housing growth areas and not simply for improvement.

Mr. Butcher: Since resources available for providing grant aid are limited, my right hon. Friend has to apply a series of criteria in order to determine which of the many applications he receives should receive priority. These are, first, committed expenditure on projects which are already under way, second, basic need for additional school places in areas of population growth, third, building work which governors have a statutory duty to undertake as a result of proposals approved under section 13 of the 1980 Education Act and, fourth, projects to improve or replace inadequate buildings.

Under-fives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the individuals appointed to the recently announced committee of inquiry into the educational experience of under-fives, indicating for each the duration they have taught in *(a)* a nursery school or class and *(b)* a reception class.

Mrs. Rumbold: The members of the committee have been invited to serve in a personal capacity with particular reference to the breadth of the committee's task. Full information on the teaching experience of all the members is not currently available; however, Mrs. Ann Sharp and Ms. Lesley Abbott taught four-year-olds in reception classes for seven years and five years respectively. Ms. Abbott also taught a nursery class for one year and Mrs. Rose Johnson teaches from time to time both reception and nursery classes.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will consider inviting Margaret Clark,

professor of education at Birmingham university, to serve on the recently announced committee of inquiry into the educational experience of under-fives; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration the recently announced committee of inquiry into the educational experience of under-fives will give to the recent review of research into the education of children under-five written by Professor Margaret Clark which was commissioned by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The committee of inquiry contains suitably qualified academics. I see no need to supplement their expertise other than through the various forms of expert evidence. Among these Professor Clark's review will without any doubt have a prominent place.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he expects to publish the Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools' document on quality in the area of education of under-fives;

(2) what areas of consideration for the recently announced committee of inquiry into the educational experience of under-fives have not already been covered by *(a)* his Department's commissioned review of research into the education of children under five and *(b)* Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools' document on quality in the area of education of under-fives; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The report by Her Majesty's inspectorate, expected to be published on 22 May, deals with good practice in maintained schools only. Professor Clark's critical evaluation of the outcome of recent research on the under-fives was not so constrained. Neither study, however, addresses fully these issues which the committee is required to take into account: the diversity of needs and of types of provision; demographic and social factors; the nature of training for teachers and other professional staff involved in the education of children under five.

Government Data Network

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what considerations his Department has given to joining the Government data network; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: The Department is considering its requirements, and the extent to which these might be met by the Government data network, and will take into account advice from Racal Data Networks Ltd.

Academic Research Equipment

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Advisory Board to the Research Councils' survey of academic research equipment will be published; if he will undertake to place a copy of the report in the Library as soon as it is published; and if he will make a statement on the future funding of university research.

Mr. Jackson: I understand that the Advisory Board for the Research Councils will receive a report on its survey of academic research equipment later this month. Publication of the report is a matter for the board.

As already announced, the Government intend to separate the funding of teaching and research in universities, through the Universities Funding Council, in order to encourage institutions to think more systematically about the quality of their performance in both areas. The level of public funding for university research will be reviewed in the normal way as part of the annual public expenditure survey, and by the UFC, the research councils, Government Departments and other publicly funded agencies.

Bovine Immunodeficiency Disease

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has received any applications for the funding of research into the bovine immunodeficiency virus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: No applications have been received. The Agricultural and Food Research Council's institute for animal health has recently started a small research programme on BIV using existing science budget funds. In addition, the institute has recently been awarded a grant from the Medical Research Council's AIDS-directed programme for work on BIV.

University Physics Department (Funding)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the level of funding to each university physics department in England and Wales over each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Universities receive public funding in the form of block grants from the Universities Funding Council, which succeeded the University Grants Committee on 1 April. It is for each university to determine how its block grant, and the other income at its disposal, is distributed between Departments.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, if he will list in tabular form *(a)* the number of teachers in each local education authority in England and Wales, *(b)* the number of pupils in each and *(c)* the pupil-teacher ratio of each.

Mr. Butcher I shall reply as soon as possible giving the figures for England. Welsh statistics are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales.

Research Vessels

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list, with dates, the home ports of vessels of the British Antarctic Survey during the last 10 years, giving reasons for any change of port.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The British Antarctic Survey vessels, which are both used to supply the survey's bases at the start of each austral summer, sailed from Southampton from 1979 to 1984, and since 1985 have used Grimsby. The change was made for reasons of efficiency in handling cargo, and for economies in the laying up costs of the ships during the summer months.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list, with dates, those ports at which

refitting or servicing has been carried out on *(a)* vessels of the British Antarctic Survey and *(b)* other research vessels of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. Kenneth Baker British Antarctic Survey vessels have been refitted at yards on the rivers Tyne and Humber exclusively in the last 10 years. Other Natural Environment Research Council vessels have used the following ports:

	Year
Discovery:—	
Viana do Castela, Portugal	1988
Cardiff	1987
Falmouth	1986, 1982
Tyne	1979-80, 1983-85
Humber	1981
Charles Darwin:—	
Valparaiso, Chile	1988
Singapore	1987
Glasgow and Mombasa	1986
Falmouth (Commissioned 1984)	1985
Challenger:—	
Great Yarmouth	1988
Cardiff	1987
Southampton	1986
Tyne	1979-82, 1985
Falmouth (no refit in 1983)	1984

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many cruises have in whole or in part been undertaken in the last 10 years by research vessels based at Research Vessel Services, Barry, on behalf of departments of the university of Southampton; and what proportions these are of the total of such work.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: During the past 10 years, Southampton university has used NERC ships as sole user for a total of nine weeks. Most cruises in recent years have involved more than one user. In the past three years Southampton university scientists participated in 24 of a total of nearly 120 cruises on Discovery, Charles Darwin and Challenger. Southampton provided the principal scientist on seven of the 24 cruises. It is not possible to calculate the proportion of the total work involved, since figures are not available for the time used where the university was not the main user.

In Vitro Fertilisation (Report)

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the report of the Medical Council into children conceived by in vitro fertilisation, referred to in his answer of 26 July, *Official Report*, column *210*, has yet been published.

Mr. Jackson: The report has not yet been published. I understand that the Medical Research Council expects it to be published later this year.

Schools (Employment Statistics)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will publish tables giving the most detailed information available, for England and Wales and by local authority, of the number of persons, full and part-time, other than fully qualified teachers, employed in schools including nursery schools and classes, breaking down the figures by nature of responsibilities undertaken and with an estimate of the full year salary costs and of average earnings per employee, at the latest available date;

(2) what information is collected, and what studies have been made, concerning the number, qualifications and responsibilities of people employed in schools other than fully qualified teachers.

Mr. Kenneth Baker *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publication "Education Statistics 1988-89 Estimates", a copy of which is in the Library, shows, separately for each respondent local education authority and for primary (including nursery), secondary and special schools, estimated full-time equivalent numbers of and associated expenditure per full-time equivalent pupil on support staff, premises related staff, administrative and clerical staff and mid-day supervisory assistants. It also shows for each authority estimated numbers of unqualified teachers and of school meals service staff broken down into organisers and clerical staff, mid-day supervisors and kitchen and canteen staff. Staff numbers are not broken down into full time and part time.

The Department collects information by local education authority on the number of student teachers and instructors in schools. The figures for January 1988 are set out in table 1. Local education authorities make returns to the Department of the Environment of their spending on non-teaching staff in schools. Table 2 sets out for 1986-87, the latest year for which firm data are available, spending by LEA on educational support staff, adminstrative and clerical staff and manual staff and on school meals staff. Information on average earnings per employee is not available.

No other information is collected, and no specific studies have been made, of the number and characteristics of persons employed in schools other than qualified teachers. The information given above is for England only: information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Table 1

Student teachers and instructors in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools (January 1988)

LEA	*Student teachers*			*Instructors*		
	Full time	*Part time*	*Total FTE*	*Full time*	*Part time*	*Total FTE*
Barking	—	—	—	28	39	47·5
Barnet	—	—	—	16	8	19·3
Bexley	—	—	—	10	5	12·9
Brent	25	—	25·0	—	8	3·3
Bromley	—	—	—	3	8	5·4
Croydon	—	—	—	1	61	23·6
Ealing	—	—	—	12	12	17·6
Enfield	—	—	—	9	36	22·9

LEA	Student teachers			Instructors		
	Full time	Part time	Total FTE	Full time	Part time	Total FTE
Haringey	—	—	—	2	—	2·0
Harrow	—	—	—	10	30	19·3
Havering	—	—	—	26	50	43·3
Hillingdon	—	—	—	13	—	13·0
Hounslow	—	—	—	5	53	20·8
Kingston	—	—	—	—	9	3·1
Newham	—	—	—	39	6	42·7
Redbridge	—	—	—	17	10	22·3
Richmond	—	—	—	—	42	7·1
Sutton	—	—	—	4	3	6·1
Waltham Forest	—	—	—	40	10	46·3
ILEA	1	—	1·0	154	1,094	391·7
Birmingham	—	—	—	8	9	12·3
Coventry	—	—	—	14	76	50·7
Dudley	—	—	—	12	3	13·6
Sandwell	—	—	—	6	6	9·3
Solihull	—	—	—	9	14	13·9
Walsall	—	—	—	2	2	3·3
Wolverhampton	—	—	—	1	6	3·5
Knowsley	—	—	—	1	2	2·9
Liverpool	—	—	—	—	25	10·4
St. Helens	—	—	2·0	4	2	5·3
Sefton	—	—	—	3	14	8·7
Wirral	—	—	—	—	2	0·6
Bolton	—	—	—	11	12	17·4
Bury	—	—	—	4	3	5·1
Manchester	—	—	—	27	11	31·8
Oldham	—	—	—	7	2	8·0
Rochdale	—	—	—	5	—	5·0
Salford	—	—	—	1	2	1·6
Stockport	—	—	—	5	3	6·9
Tameside	—	—	—	—	—	—
Trafford	—	—	—	2	9	4·7
Wigan	—	—	—	13	1	13·2
Barnsley	—	—	—	1	2	1·3
Doncaster	—	—	—	14	9	18·5
Rotherham	—	—	—	15	12	19·8
Sheffield	—	—	—	13	11	18·5
Bradford	—	—	—	19	9	27·0
Calderdale	—	—	—	8	3	10·0
Kirklees	—	—	—	27	21	36·8
Leeds	1	—	1·0	9	34	31·1
Wakefield	—	—	—	9	2	9·8
Gateshead	—	—	—	—	32	14·1
Newcastle upon Tyne	—	—	—	2	2	2·8
North Tyneside	—	—	—	5	31	12·0
South Tyneside	—	—	—	8	—	8·0
Sunderland	—	—	—	8	3	9·5
Avon	—	—	—	2	10	7·6
Bedfordshire	—	—	—	25	27	36·5
Berkshire	—	—	—	17	26	27·6
Buckinghamshire	—	—	—	12	14	17·2
Cambrideshire	—	—	—	9	18	17·3
Cheshire	54	9	57·5	2	69	12·3
Cleveland	—	—	—	10	26	23·1
Cornwall	—	—	—	14	20	21·1
Cumbria	—	—	—	7	11	10·4
Derbyshire	—	—	—	14	14	18·9
Devon	—	—	—	8	30	17·5
Dorset	—	—	—	1	23	9·0
Durham	—	—	—	40	11	43·7
East Sussex	—	—	—	12	16	16·7
Essex	—	—	—	123	172	171·0
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	5	8	6·8
Hampshire	1	1	1·2	49	88	85·4
Hereford and Worcester	—	—	—	10	4	11·7
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	43	76	73·7
Humberside	—	—	—	7	31	23·0
Isle of Wight	—	—	—	1	3	1·9
Kent	—	—	—	26	40	42·8
Lancashire	—	—	—	5	31	18·1
Leicestershire	—	—	—	20	24	31·0
Lincolnshire	—	—	—	5	28	18·6
Norfolk	—	—	—	44	23	56·1
North Yorkshire	—	—	—	12	47	30·0
Northamptonshire	—	—	—	34	36	48·0
Northumberland	—	—	—	—	8	4·3

LEA	Student teachers			Instructors		
	Full time	Part time	Total FTE	Full time	Part time	Total FTE
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	23	1	23·7
Oxfordshire	—	—	—	1	37	16·1
Shropshire	—	—	—	10	44	18·1
Somerset	—	—	—	5	1	5·1
Staffordshire	—	—	—	38	8	41·8
Suffolk	—	—	—	13	24	25·7
Surrey	—	—	—	7	17	14·9
Warwickshire	—	—	—	11	27	19·8
West Sussex	—	—	—	12	11	19·1
Wiltshire	—	—	—	8	8	10·8
England	84	10	87·7	1,350	2,974	2,317·9

Table 2

Expenditure on salaries and wages[1] 1986-87 financial year

LEA	Schools			School Meals
	Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Special			
	Educational Support Staff[2] £'000	Administrative and Clerical Staff[3] £'000	Manual Staff[4] £'000	All Staff £'000
Barking	1,118	671	1,907	1,439
Barnet	2,575	1,049	3,393	2,475
Bexley	573	764	2,710	1,013
Brent	2,551	635	4,002	3,836
Bromley	1,218	850	2,198	1,668
Croydon	1,359	1,183	3,260	2,610
Ealing	2,608	1,093	3,017	1,372
Enfield	2,077	870	2,918	1,912
Haringey	3,584	906	3,668	3,388
Harrow	1,633	747	2,559	1,002
Havering	1,255	884	3,031	1,833
Hillingdon	1,287	1,646	3,188	1,388
Hounslow	2,192	820	2,325	1,968
Kingston-upon-Thames	490	754	1,056	917
Merton	821	454	858	310
Newham	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Redbridge	843	1,072	2,546	1,473
Richmond-upon-Thames	848	288	1,227	907
Sutton	788	661	1,485	1,108
Waltham Forest	2,436	1,131	3,191	1,973
ILEA	32,962	28,499	65,565	30,930
Birmingham	9,577	2,850	9,508	11,227
Coventry	341	1,554	4,247	2,861
Dudley	1,507	1,113	1,807	1,941
Sandwell	2,965	925	3,268	2,433
Solihull	1,564	553	1,408	1,586
Walsall	1,952	1,789	4,703	3,355
Wolverhampton	2,799	785	3,235	2,234
Knowsley	1,050	586	2,423	2,468
Liverpool	3,073	1,476	8,889	4,229
St. Helens	1,207	598	2,050	2,393
Sefton	1,373	794	2,797	2,900
Wirral	1,299	959	3,263	2,847
Bolton	1,789	642	2,760	2,703
Bury	1,007	415	1,495	1,674
Manchester	5,031	1,786	6,547	7,645
Oldham	1,766	649	1,954	2,438
Rochdale	1,420	906	2,833	2,642
Salford	1,939	762	2,861	2,400
Stockport	1,385	950	2,357	2,603
Tameside	2,086	725	2,033	2,878
Trafford	831	514	2,102	1,296
Wigan	1,398	1,129	3,565	2,978
Barnsley	1,461	775	2,368	2,695
Doncaster	1,834	911	3,768	3,942
Rotherham	1,325	762	2,507	2,849
Sheffield	5,425	1,544	6,492	6,547
Bradford	4,412	1,194	5,544	4,184
Calderdale	1,221	393	1,591	2,179
Kirklees	2,583	1,085	4,013	4,543
Leeds	4,629	2,184	7,257	7,589
Wakefield	2,166	728	3,198	3721
Gateshead	1,243	636	2,153	1,858
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne	2,904	938	2,870	3,647
North Tyneside	1,567	673	2,047	2,092

LEA	Schools Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Special			School Meals
	Educational Support Staff[2] £'000	Administrative and Clerical Staff[3] £'000	Manual Staff[4] £'000	All Staff £'000
South Tyneside	1,097	335	1,501	1,672
Sunderland	2,585	821	2,716	3,346
Avon	5,305	3,021	7,523	8,770
Bedfordshire	3,149	2,151	4,711	4,798
Berkshire	3,759	2,333	7,641	2,537
Buckinghamshire	4,766	2,016	6,352	2,961
Cambridgeshire	3,557	1,852	5,264	3,613
Cheshire	7,224	3,196	9,382	9,103
Cleveland	4,540	1,741	6,286	7,827
Cornwall	2,296	965	3,518	3,222
Cumbria	2,957	1,139	4,782	4,865
Derbyshire	8,623	1,640	8,823	11,136
Devon	3,717	1,880	7,147	6,751
Dorset	2,000	1,518	5,332	1,353
Durham	3,666	1,125	7,520	6,302
East Sussex	2,709	2,245	4,271	4,278
Essex	6,307	4,610	13,098	10,710
Gloucestershire	2,491	1,495	3,546	2,873
Hampshire	2,005	9,363	13,637	9,623
Hereford and Worcester	1,907	1,766	5,700	302
Hertfordshire	5,962	3,589	9,172	8,400
Humberside	5,823	2,066	2,961	10,240
Isle of Wight	806	417	1,166	735
Kent	5,186	5,058	7,275	10,275
Lancashire	6,032	3,957	12,227	13,511
Leicestershire	5,503	2,945	8,685	7,592
Lincolnshire	2,888	1,314	3,463	2,404
Norfolk	4,022	1,592	4,795	4,703
North Yorkshire	3,014	2,089	5,484	5,212
Northamptonshire	2,273	2,348	4,987	4,450
Northumberland	1,580	620	3,416	3,339
Nottinghamshire	7,285	3,005	10,734	9,717
Oxfordshire	3,849	1,426	4,517	2,817
Salop	1,812	1,189	3,684	3,350
Somerset	2,242	1,364	3,163	3,705
Staffordshire	6,729	3,229	9,677	6,642
Suffolk	2,511	1,772	4,288	3,720
Surrey	2,389	3,623	7,025	6,336
Warwickshire	2,802	1,379	3,266	3,281
West Sussex	2,2391	1,744	4,747	3,302
Wiltshire	2,022	1,448	5,014	3,083
England Total	295,899	171,524	486,435	401955

Notes:—
[1] The figures quoted are based on LEA returns to DoE on Form RO1.
[2] Nursery assistants, nurses and medical staff, laboratory, workshop and technology assistants and technicians employed in schools.
[3] Clerks, typists, receptionists and telephonists who look after the administrative needs of the education service.
[4] Caretakers, cleaners and midday supervisory assistants.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Advisory Committee on Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of the members of his advisory committee on pesticides.

Mr. Ryder: I published such a list on 26 January 1989, and a copy is lodged in the Library of the House.

Organic Farming

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any proposals to encourage the replacement of existing intensive farming systems with organic alternatives.

Mr. Ryder: It is for individual farmers to decide whether to switch from intensive to organic farming systems. However, I am anxious that our own farmers should meet as large a share as possible of the increasing demand for organic produce. To this end I encouraged Food From Britain to establish the United Kingdom register of organic food standards which is currently drawing up agreed standards for the production and processing of organic food and is to provide an independent verification system. In addition, our agricultural advisory services now offer specialised advice to organic producers; UKROFS is being consulted on research needs; and the possibility of including an organic option in any extensification scheme that may be adopted under the European Community arrangements is under active consideration.

Intervention Stores

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the amount of foodstuffs, by weight and at current prices, held in the United Kingdom each year since 1979 under European

Economic Community intervention policies in the following categories *(a)* butter, *(b)* beef, *(c)* wine and *(d)* cheese; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested is as follows:

Tonnes

Year ending	*Butter*		*Beef*		*Wine*	*Cheese*
	Held in intervention	*Privately owned and stored against EC aided contracts*	*Held in intervention*	*Privately owned and stored against EC aided contracts*		
1980	19,148	4,674	25,588	2,055	Nil	Nil
1981	29	17,976	10,247	2,093	Nil	Nil
1982	8,830	26,085	13,025	310	Nil	Nil
1983	108,331	8,294	16,781	365	Nil	Nil
1984	144,430	10,097	52,430	29,200	Nil	Nil
1985	201,688	4,309	85,029	7,633	Nil	Nil
1986	237,632	7,066	55,985	5,970	Nil	Nil
1987	159,930	6,118	54,067	4,983	Nil	Nil
1988	24,179	448	25,412	4,357	Nil	Nil

Note: Current valuation figures for intervention butter and beef are £1,422·46/tonne and £1,322·71/tonne respectively.

Sources:

Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3721/85 of 20 December 1985—Official Journal of European Communities (OJ) No. L361 of 31 October 1985.

Council Regulation (EEC) No. 4034/86 of 22 December 1986—OJ No. L376 of 31 December 1986.

Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3977/87 of 21 December 1987—OJ No. L375 of 31 December 1987.

The figures shown above do not take into account quota exchanges.

In the years 1986, 1987 and 1988 the United Kingdom has concluded important quota exchanges with the Netherlands giving the United Kingdom valuable additional opportunities of sole in the Irish sea, south coast of Ireland area and North sea of 590 tonnes, 430 tonnes and 655 tonnes respectively. So far in 1989 we have negotiated an additional 725 tonnes of sole from the Netherlands through quota swaps.

Sheep Dips

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the approval process for organophosphate-based sheep dips took into account the regularly occurring residue impurities in technical grade organophosphates.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes.

Veterinary Medicine

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards European Community harmonisation of veterinary medicine licensing and distribution.

Mr. MacGregor: Common rules making the issue of licences for many veterinary medicinal products conditional upon a satisfactory assessment of safety, quality and efficacy were established in 1981. In February this year the Council received from the Commission proposals to extend the scope of these rules, and to harmonise the records which distributors are required to keep. The distribution system itself would not be affected. An explanatory memorandum (4228/89) has been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee, and I have also asked interested bodies to let me know their views.

Sole

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the European Community quota for Holland for sole for each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Sole quotas for the Netherlands for each of the last three years were as follows:

tonnes

Geographical Region (Zones of International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES))	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
III a, b, c, d	50	70	80
II, IV	15,050	10,530	10,530
VII a	300	330	275
VII h, j, k	80	80	80
VIII a, b	105	305	275
Total	15,585	11,315	11,240

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of those pre-1965 pesticide ingredients which have been re-reviewed, indicating in each case the year of re-review and whether or not the ingredient was approved.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested by the hon. Gentleman may be found in table 1 of the information paper on the programme for routine reviews of approved pesticides which was made available to the public on 16 March 1989 and a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Of the 36 active ingredients or groups of active ingredients listed in table 1, numbers 2, 5, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 33 were first cleared for supply and use in the United Kingdom before 31 December 1965.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to complete his re-review of pre-1965 pesticide ingredients.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 23 March 1989 at column *726*.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of all pre-1965 pesticide ingredients currently in use which have not yet been re-reviewed; and when he expects each ingredient to be reviewed.

Mr. Ryder: Such a list is already available in table 3 of the information paper on the programme of routine reviews of approved pesticides, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those pesticide ingredients which he is currently reviewing; and if he will indicate in each case the year of the ingredient's initial approval.

Mr. Ryder: Pesticide active ingredients which are currently under review are listed in tables 1 and 2 of the information paper on the programme for routine review of approved pesticides, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. The year in which each was initially cleared is as follows:

	Year
2-aminobutane	1972
Alachlor	1969
Bromoxynil	1967
Captan	1962
Diazinon	1956
Dimethoate	pre-1958
Dinocap	1964
Fenbutatin oxide	1983
Fentin acetate	1965
Fentin hydroxide	1964
Furmecyclox	1979
Ioxynil	1964
Iprodine	1976
Methyl bromide	1964
2-Phenylphenol	1967
Tecnazene	1970
Tributyltin oxide	1976

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will identify those European Community countries that vaccinate against foot and mouth disease in cattle.

Mr. MacGregor: Cattle are vaccinated against foot and mouth disease in all European Community countries except Denmark, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to stop the testing for foot and mouth disease by British veterinary staff of imported livestock; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: No tests for foot and mouth disease are carried out on imported livestock. Livestock susceptible to the disease, from countries which have had outbreaks within the last two years or where vaccination is practised, are required to be tested with negative results before export and also to undergo 21 days supervised post-import quarantine. There are no plans to remove these requirements from our import controls.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further work is necessary before field trials can begin of the tuberculosis vaccine for badgers which has been developed by the Middlesex hospital.

Mr. MacGregor: Further work is necessary to check whether accidental contact with the vaccine could lead to desensitisation of cattle infected with tuberculosis so that they would no longer be reactors when tuberculin tested.

Veterinary Medical Products

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those products which the European Economic Community veterinary medical products committee have recommended as being suitable for product licences for each of the last three years.

Mr. MacGregor: The committee on veterinary medicinal products has not yet reached a conclusion on any of the product licence applications referred to it.

Alphachloralose

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what circumstances his Department authorises the use of alphachoroloralose against wild birds; and how many such licences were granted in each of the last three years.

Mr. Ryder: Under section 16(9)(d) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 my right hon. Friend is the appropriate authority for the purpose of issuing licences under section 16(1)(i), (j) and (k) of the Act for the use of prohibited methods to kill or take wild birds.

In practice my Department issues licences only to local authorities of competent pest control contractors and for a limited number of species, namely feral pigeon, house sparrows and in one case, herring gulls. The number of licences issued in the last three years were:

	Number
1986	685
1987	738
1988	589

Milk (Testing)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department is taking to ensure that there will be no reduction in the number of milk samples being tested as a result of the closure of research stations in the south-west, the north-west, the south midlands and Kent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The only regular milk testing carried out by my Department is to ensure that untreated milk producers comply with one of the conditions of their licence. This work will not be significantly affected by the closure of certain microbiology laboratories, since the samples in question will be transported to other laboratories. The comprehensive testing carried out by the Milk Marketing Board (which includes monthly testing for brucellosis on behalf of the Ministry) will not be affected at all.

Research (Funding)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the impact on the Agriculture and Food Research Council of funding reductions already announced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: Commissions by my Department with the Agricultural and Food Research Council will be reduced by £1·6 million in 1989-90, as part of the £5 million reduction in Government funding which has been

announced for that year. Decisions on the future programme of commissioned work will depend on the consultations we are currently holding with industry organisations. The implications of changes in funding for the staff and research establishments of the Agricultural and Food Research Council are matters for that organisation.

Salmonella

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the level of additional funding awarded to the Institute of Animal Health for research on salmonella contamination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 21 March at columns *514-15*. My Department was already spending around £700,000 in 1989-90 on research at the Institute of Animal Health on enteric diseases of poultry, including salmonella. Two new salmonella projects have now been added at a cost of £173,000 in 1989-90.

Veterinary Surgeons

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is proposing to take to consider the supply and demand for veterinary surgeons, particularly in the light of the Riley report.

Mr. MacGregor: Consideration of the Riley report is a matter for the Universities Funding Council. I am concerned, however that there appears to be a growing shortage of British-trained veterinary surgeons. After discussions with my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Scotland, I have decided that it would be sensible and prudent to review the demand for veterinary surgeons in both the public service and the private sector. The study will also consider the supply of veterinary education and the demand from home and overseas students and will have regard to the potential funding from the Universities Funding Council and other sources. I shall be announcing the details as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Climatic Changes

Q34. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to arrest world climatic changes.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the Government's reply to the first report from the Environment Committee, Session 1987-88 (Cm. 552).

The United Kingdom continues to play a full part in international consideration of the climate change issue, in the WMO/UNEP intergovernmental panel on climate change, the EC and in other special fora.

Budget

Q78. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the Budget.

Q152. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the Budget.

Q190. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the Budget.

The Prime Minister: The proposals in the Budget have been widely welcomed.

EC Fraud

Q134. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding fraud in the European Economic Community.

Q185. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding fraud in the EEC.

Q204. **Sir Hugh Rossi:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding fraud in the European Economic Community.

The Prime Minister: I have received a small number of representations.

British Intelligence (History)

Q192. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister when she expects an announcement to be made on the possible publication of the volume prepared by Professor Sir Michael Howard in the series entitled the "Official History of British Intelligence"; what criteria are being used in determining whether publication can take place; whether publication with appropriate deletions is being considered; on whose authority Sir Michael Howard was commissioned to write his volume; what has been the cost to public funds of work on this volume; and what assessment she has made of the utility and cost-effectiveness of the commissioning of official histories on intelligence matters which are not subsequently published.

The Prime Minister: The "Official History of British Intelligence in the Second World War" was commissioned in 1971 by the Government of the day. The right to decide on publication of this history, as with all official histories, rests exclusively with the Government. Four volumes of the "History of British Intelligence" have already been published, volume I in 1979, volume II in 1981, volume III, part 1 in 1984 and volume III part 2 in 1988. The decision about timing and form of publication of the volume commissioned from Professor Sir Michael Howard, the direct cost of which was in the region of £10,000, will be taken in the light of our best judgment of the national interest.

Griffiths Report

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Prime Minister when she intends to announce the Government's conclusions on the report by Sir Roy Griffiths; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 6 April.

Engagements

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 11 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions have taken place as to the feasibility of introducing an employee share ownership scheme in any future privatisation that his Department may sponsor.

Mr. Maude: When considering any privatisation proposal, the possibility of providing for an employee share ownership scheme is always carefully assessed.

Regional Initiatives

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he plans to announce any new initiatives to benefit Britain's regions.

Mr. Atkins: No. Major changes in the focus of DTI's policies were made early last year. Regional policy now operates within a framework designed to encourage enterprise and economic growth in all parts of the country but with extra help available for firms in the regions.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the latest figures he has for the growth in manufacturing output.

Mr. Atkins: Manufacturing output in the three months to January 1989 was at a record level, 7 per cent. higher than a year earlier, 11 per cent. above its 1979 average level and 6·5 per cent. above the previous all-time peak year of 1973.

Import Substitution

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he will take to encourage import substitution by United Kingdom manufacturing industry.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not for the Government to tell industry what to produce. The greatest encouragement to buy British is the availability of competitive British goods and services. My Department's policies are geared to helping business to achieve this.

Scotch Whisky

Mr. Sims: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what progress has been made towards the liberalisation of Scotch whisky and the reduction in the rates of import duty and other taxation levied on Scotch whisky in the Korean market.

Mr. Alan Clark: We continue to press the Korean authorities on all appropriate occasions, both bilaterally and through the European Community, to remove restrictions on the import of Scottish whisky to Korea. The Korean Government have recently proposed certain steps towards liberalisation of this important market. These proposals are welcome, but some problems remain. Further relaxation is being sought, and the Government will continue to pursue the issue vigorously.

Distance Measures

Mr. Meale: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what assessment he has made of the benefits for the United Kingdom resulting from the abolition by the European Economic Community of non-metric measures of distance;

(2) what assessment he has made of the economic advantages which will result from the implementation of the European Economic Community proposal to abolish non-metric measures of distance.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* My Department has made no assessment of the benefits or economic advantages which would result if non-metric measures of distance were abolished. In view of the substantial costs which would be involved in metricating distance and speed road signs and associated equipment in vehicles, the European Commission's proposal to amend the units of measurement directive would allow the United Kingdom to decide whether to phase out the mile, yard, foot and inch for road transport purposes.

Single Market

Mr. Meale: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he intends to change *(a)* the method of collection of trade statistics and *(b)* the form of their public presentation, as a consequence of the completion of the European Economic Community single market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* I have nothing to add to the reply given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on 21 February at column *546* on the method of collection. The presentation of United Kingdom trade statistics after the completion of the single market has yet to be decided.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lynx

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Attorney-General what representations the Treasury Solicitor has received concerning the self-misrepresentations of Lynx as a charity; what reply he has sent; what further action he will take in the light of continued misrepresentation in relation to donations from the profits deriving from sales of the "Eat Your own Pet Cookbook"; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: On a number of occasions since October 1987 the Treasury Solicitor has received

complaints from solicitors acting for the British Fur Trade Association about statements, which have appeared in four publications, suggesting that Lynx, a campaigning body opposed to the trade in animal furs, is a charity. On each occasion the Treasury Solicitor has on my behalf made inquiries of the directors of Lynx, as a result of which I have in each case been satisfied that Lynx itself is not responsible for the alleged misrepresentations and has not sought to hold itself out as a charity.

TRANSPORT

M1 (Traffic Flow)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the current peak hourly traffic flow *(a)* south bound and *(b)* north bound on the M1 south of Luton; what was the maximum hourly flow for which the original specifications were drawn up; and what is the current average speed during peak hours in each direction.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The maximum hourly traffic flow recorded in each direction between junctions 9 and 10 of the M1 is 5,200 vehicles. During peak hours congestion may lead to lower traffic flows. There were no hourly traffic flow standards when this motorway, opened in 1959, was designed. Vehicle speeds are not recorded systematically on this stretch of motorway.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will increase the length of the deceleration lane on the M1 to ease the way for traffic leaving the M25.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are considering what remedial action might be justified. We are aware of some problems of queuing at this point.

Explosives (Carriage by Road)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which date he approved the draft Carriage of Explosives by Road Regulations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: 14 March.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he expects that the Governments of Germany and the Netherlands will continue to insist on the provision of locally trained drivers on British vehicles carrying explosives, following the introduction of the new Carriage of Explosives by Road Regulations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Under the regulations the driver and any attendant must have received adequate training and instruction in the dangers to which the explosives carried may give rise, the action to be taken in an emergency and their duties under the regulations. A written record of the training must be kept. The CBI has prepared an appropriate training course. We intend to use this course as the basis for negotiation of reciprocal recognition with other authorities.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will lay the new Carriage of Explosives by Road Regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The new regulations have been laid today; an advance copy of the associated approved code of practice has been placed in the Library.

Since the regulations are necessarily in part somewhat technical, the Department has also provided the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments with an additional memorandum on the changes being made and the ways in which these seek to improve the pre-1974 health and safety legislation in this particular field.

In making the regulations in the aftermath of the Peterborough incident, and following further discussion with the HSE, one change has been made to the draft code of practice. The guidance in the proposed code would have allowed the normal requirement for double manning to be waived in certain circumstances and where there was a means of radio communication in the cab. In the light of the discussions in the House on 23 March and additional comments received about the use of new technology to safeguard loads, the Health and Safety Commission has been invited to consider further that proposal.

The question of mixed loads has been considered again. As I explained in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) on 4 April at columns *66-67*, the new regulations aim to ensure that the possibility of ignition of any kind of explosion is not increased during carriage by the mixing of the load and that the consequences of an incident are not made worse by so doing. The main problem is fire, and the point is that high explosives are likely to burn to detonation whether detonators and other items are present or not. The new regulations proposed by the Health and Safety Executive deal satisfactorily with this.

As explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on 4 April at column *67*, there is a requirement in the new regulations for the route to be followed to be agreed with the relevant chief officers of police when a large load of the most dangerous type of explosive is being carried. To require prior notification or agreement on routes for all dangerous goods, as has been suggested, would involve the emergency services in masses of additional paperwork which would not provide overall benefit in safety terms.

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions have taken place as to the feasibility in introducing an employee share ownership scheme in any future privatisation that his Department may sponsor.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend will certainly consider the scope for furthering the Government's policy of encouraging employee shareholdings in any future privatisations that may be sponsored by this Department.

Road Maintenance

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement outlining the extent to which local authorities have used funds which were originally allocated by his Department for road maintenance for other projects, making specific reference to the situation of the Cheshire county council.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No specific grant is made for local authority spending on local road maintenance. Road maintenance needs are included in the needs assessments used to calculate authorities' block grant entitlements. Authorities have discretion as to how they choose to spend

their grant. Statistical returns from Cheshire county council suggest that in 1988-89 it budgeted to spend more on local road maintenance than its assessed need to spend.

HGV Tests

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current waiting period for HGV tests in the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Between four and six and a half weeks. The wait at some testing stations is longer than we would like because of the rise in demand for tests and the diversion of the work load resulting from the unforeseen need to close the Wallasey testing station. Urgent action is being taken to reduce delays. A replacement for Wallasey opens this summer, and the vehicle inspectorate executive agency is taking on extra staff.

Ferndown Relief Road

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he is making for reconsideration of the line of route of the Ferndown relief road, following rejection by the Department of the Environment on environmental grounds of the route proposed by Dorset county council.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I understand that Dorset county council is re-examining its proposals following the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to refuse planning permission for its proposed route. It will be for my right hon. Friend to decide whether he wishes to consider any revised route which may be proposed by the county council.

Ferries (Safety)

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there is any evidence that the new safety rules for roll-on/roll-off ferries recently introduced by his Department are being avoided by ferries registered in foreign countries but operating from British ports.

Mr. Portillo: The recently introduced safety rules for ro-ro passenger ferries, the Weighing of Goods Vehicles and Other Cargo Regulations and the Loading and Stability Assessment of Ro/Ro Passenger Ships Regulations, apply to all foreign-registered ro-ro passenger ferries while in United Kingdom ports with effect from 31 March 1989 and 4 April 1989 respectively.

I have no evidence of any intent to avoid them.

Toll Charges

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he is giving to private funding for a new motorway between Newcastle and the Scottish border; and what is the Government's policy concerning the imposition of toll charges on any part of the national road network.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department is not considering motorway proposals between Newcastle and the Scottish border. We are keen to encourage the private funding of infrastructure and would willingly consider proposals from the private sector. Promoters of privately funded schemes would need to recoup their costs and this would probably involve tolls. There are no plans to impose tolls on existing routes.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he can now announce a decision on the future of the Settle-Carlisle railway.

Mr. Channon: I have now completed my consideration of British Rail's proposal to close the Settle-Carlisle railway. Having reviewed all the evidence, I have decided to refuse closure consent for this line as well as for the associated Blackburn-Hellifield line. A number of factors have changed since I announced last year that I was minded to give consent to closure.

There have been changes in the financial case. For example, following the trial repairs to Ribblehead viaduct that I requested last year, it now seems that it will be much cheaper to repair the whole structure than previously thought, and a new survey by the local authorities suggests that traffic on the line has continued to grow and that significantly more people are travelling for essential purposes. British Rail has estimated that revenue on the line is some 40 per cent. higher in 1988-89 than in 1987-88. I believe that there is scope for increasing revenue further by better marketing of the line and by the pricing of tourist journeys on a more commercial basis. The line may continue to run at a loss, but not necessarily a large one. As required by statute, I have also taken account of new evidence on hardship and the line's importance to the local economy.

The private sector has shown interest in the line and I want it to be involved in helping to develop it. I have asked the chairman of British Rail to see what private sector involvement can be arranged to make the most of marketing and operating the line.

The local authorities are committed to co-operating with British Rail and other organisations to support and promote the line. It has been proposed that a trust fund be set up to care for the structures on the line of heritage importance. I support that proposal. I also look to all who have promised to support the line to work together to ensure that it has a successful future and so that the case for closure will not re-emerge.

ENERGY

Opencast Operations

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will detail the ex-gratia payments made for community benefit and as a sign of goodwill by British Coal's opencast operations in each year since 1979; (2) if he will explain the changes between 1987 and 1988 in the percentage of the total cost of mining opencast coal in Wales by British Coal devoted to site restoration.

Mr. Michael Spicer: These are matters for the British Coal Corporation, and I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

EMPLOYMENT

Restart

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline the terms of reference and details of the large restart cohort survey which his Department will be commissioning; if he will explain the

position of those unemployed claimants who will not be called for restart interviews for the purposes of creating a control group; and whether the survey will be asking questions to find out to what degree claimants feel coerced into participation in employment service schemes as a result of the restart process.

Mr. Lee: The terms of reference of the restart cohort study are to look at the effects of restart on its clients and on the operation of the labour market, and to describe how restart is achieving changes.

The study will be based on a random sample of 16,000 people, selected from those becoming eligible for a restart counselling interview. Information will be collected on their progress after they have had their restart interview. Survey interviews will be held with a random selected group of 5,500 people within the sample. Participation will be voluntary.

The position of those in the control group is that they will not be invited for a restart interview but they will, of course, have access to the full range of employment service and Training Agency services through the jobcentres and unemployment benefit office networks. Eligibility for programmes will not be affected. Any member of the control group who requests a counselling interview will be able to have one.

The interview survey will include questions on the characteristics and employment background of clients, and their attitudes to and views of the restart process.

Bridging Allowance

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of the county of South Yorkshire have applied for bridging allowance since September 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: From September 1988 to 9 March 1989, the latest available date, 937 young people in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas have received bridging allowance. I am satisfied that there are more than sufficient YTS places in these areas for all young people who apply for them.

Benefits (Young People)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds in Doncaster and Mexborough have lost benefits since September 1988 because they are unemployed or have been unable to take advantage of guaranteed YTS places.

Mr. Cope: The guaranteed offer of a YTS place to all 16 and 17-year-olds not in full-time education or employment means that there is now no need for young people to be unemployed. I am satisfied that the training agency has more than sufficient YTS places available in Doncaster and Mexborough for those who apply for one.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of unemployed people in the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of South Yorkshire who have been helped to start a business through the enterprise allowance scheme in each year since its inception; and how many of these schemes have failed in each year.

Mr. Lee: The information is not available in the form requested. In the area covered by the Wakefield EAS office which comprises Barnsley, Castleford, Doncaster, Mexborough, Pontefract, Thorne and Wakefield, a total of 7,189 unemployed people have joined the scheme from its inception to the end of the 1988-89 financial year.

In each financial year the figures are as follows:

Financial year	*Number*
1983-84	442
1984-85	628
1985-86	892
1986-87	1,519
1987-88	1,824
1988-89	1,884

Data on business closure are not available below regional level.

Employment Training

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have so far benefited from the employment training scheme; in what particular ways; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Unemployed people clearly recognise the benefits the programme has to offer and the opportunity it provides to help them get a job. By 31 March over 238,000 people had entered the programme. This is a major achievement in the seven months since the programme was launched.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been spent advertising employment training.

Mr. Nicholls: A total of approximately £10·3 million has been spent on advertising employment training between July 1988 and March 1989.

YTS

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest fatal and major injury accident rate for participants on YTS.

Mr. Cope: The latest available figure for the year ended on 31 December 1988 is 146 per 100,000 trainees.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many local education authorities, schools and colleges are currently taking part in the technical and vocational education initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: All education authorities in Great Britain are taking part in the technical and vocational education initiative; at present approximately 2,000 schools and colleges are involved. From September this year, some two thirds of authorities will have moved from the pilot phase to extending the initiative to all their schools and colleges.

Health and Safety

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to increase the qualifications of competent persons in health and safety matters.

Mr. Nicholls: I have no such plans. Requirements for "competent persons" in health and safety law do not normally specify qualifications because competence depends on a number of things including experience, training and personal qualities. Qualifications do not necessarily show that someone is competent for a particular task. Ultimately, whether a person is competent for the purpose depends on the circumstances and is a matter for the courts to decide.

Skills Training Agency

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a further statement on his timetable to privatise the Skills Training Agency.

Mr. Cope: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his statement on 13 March, it is important for sale to proceed as rapidly as possible. It is not possible to specify a timetable precisely at this stage, but we intend that the sale process should be completed as soon as possible after the relevant provisions of the Employment Bill have received Royal Assent.

Wage Levels (South-East)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the lowest wage levels reported to the south-east wages inspectorate in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is *(a)* the current rate of unemployment and *(b)* the average annual salary of (i) all men in full-time employment, (ii) all women in full-time employment and (iii) all in full-time employment *(a)* in Great Britain, *(b)* in England and *(c)* in the standard English region.

Mr. Lee: The latest available information is provided in the tables.

Unemployment rates in February 1989

	Unemployment as a percentage of the workforce[1]		
	Males	*Females*	*All*
Great Britain	8·0	4·6	6·6
England	7·4	4·3	6·1
of which:			
South East	5·0	3·0	4·2
East Anglia	3·8	3·1	3·5
South West	5·7	4·2	5·0
West Midlands	8·1	5·2	6·9
East Midlands	7·1	4·4	6·0
Yorkshire and Humberside	9·9	5·6	8·1
North West	11·9	6·2	9·4
North	13·3	6·8	10·6

[1] Unemployment, seasonally adjusted, expressed as a percentage of the total workforce (the sum of unemployed claimants, employees in employment, self-employed, HM Forces and participants on work-related government training programmes) at mid 1988.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates whose earnings were not affected by absence, April 1988

	Males £	*Females* £	*All* £
Great Britain	245·8	164·2	218·4
England	248·4	166·1	220·9
of which:			
South East	283·0	188·1	249·5
East Anglia	229·6	150·3	204·4
South West	227·6	152·2	202·7
West Midlands	225·8	148·9	201·2
East Midlands	222·5	145·3	197·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	224·1	150·6	201·5
North West	231·1	153·2	205·5
North	223·8	148·8	199·3

Source: New Earnings Survey

Black Workers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the work force of each local authority is black.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have been asked to reply. This information is not collected centrally.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing (Newham)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the 14,000 units of housing for Newham mentioned in the draft strategic planning guidance for London published on 6 March will be for people nominated from Newham's housing waiting list.

Mr. Trippier: This is a matter for future decision. The draft guidance proposes the number of additional dwellings in the period 1987-2001 for which Newham should make provision in preparing its unitary development plan. The guidance refers to the use of land not to questions of tenure.

PSA (Cambridge)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he had made of the number of additional vehicle journeys into and out of the city of Cambridge that will arise as a result of his transferring Property Services Agency staff and functions from Newmarket to Cambridge, breaking this down into the following categories: staff journeys to and from their homes in and around Newmarket, client journeys by United States Air Force, Royal Air Force and other Ministry of Defence personnel, journeys made to service the construction of Property Services Agency's additional accommodation in Cambridge, and journeys made by contractors and others who service these officials' activities.

Mr. Chope: The transfer affects about 35 staff. The additional vehicle movements generated by the transfer will be insignificant in the context of total vehicle movements in Cambridge.

Housing Action Trusts

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the costs of the examination of the Windmill lane estate in Sandwell for its inclusion in the housing action trust programme.

Mr. Trippier: The total cost of the Sandwell housing action trust study completed on 1 December 1988 will not be known until all claims from the consultants have been settled by the Department. We expect the final cost to be less than £105,000, including VAT. The costs of examining the Windmill lane estate, which was one of four covered by the study, are not separately identifiable.

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the costs of examination of the Cape Hill area of Smethwick for its possible inclusion in the housing action trust programme; and what will be the additional costs for the further examination of that area for treatment under the programme.

Mr. Trippier: The Sandwell housing action trust study included an examination of the Windmill lane estate but not of the wider Cape Hill area. For the reasons set out in their report the consultants recommended that a second study should be carried out to examine some further areas. This study is now in progress; the cost of the contract is commercially confidential.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many requests he has received to set up housing action trusts by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* resident associations, *(c)* tenants' groups or associations, *(d)* urban renewal agencies and *(e)* amenity groups; and if he will list them.

Mr. Trippier: We have received a number of inquiries from local authorities, tenants and other residents interested in the establishment of housing action trusts. It is for them to decide whether to make their informal approaches public. The latest position on the currently proposed trusts was set out in my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 16 March at column *322*.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing action trusts he expects to be in place in 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on 16 March at column *322*. It will be for the individual tenants to decide whether they want my right hon. Friend to seek Parliament's approval to orders setting up housing action trusts.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the Property Services Agency has recently paid £50 per sq ft to rent space at the Adelphi, the Strand.

Mr. Chope: The PSA acquired the Adelphi at the behest of the Departments of Health and Social Security as part of a major planned rationalisation of its London HQ accommodation.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Property Services Agency has recently examined office properties in docklands, available at under £25 per sq ft, for the location of some central London staff in better and cheaper accommodation than in the west end.

Mr. Chope: It is the Government's policy that Departments should review the location of their work with a view to selecting locations offering better value for money, easier recruitment and retention of staff and other advantages. PSA is currently assisting Departments in undertaking their reviews by giving relevant information on property in different locations, including docklands.

Docklands (Housing)

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the commitment by the London Docklands development corporation in the agreement with the London borough of Newham on affordable rented housing in the borough; and what progress has been made in achieving this.

Mr. Trippier: The memorandum of agreement states that

"both authorities agree the objective to produce 1,500 social housing units to let at fair rent or thereabouts subject to its achievement being reasonably practicable in all the financial circumstances".

Negotiations are at a very advanced stage for the provision of approximately 500 units at Winsor park. Discussions are under way concerning further social housing units on other sites in the royal docks.

Housing Associations

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the number of housing association units of accommodation which will be financed by mixed housing association grant and private finance for the 12 months period commencing 1 April; and if he will break down his estimates by Housing Corporation regions.

Mr. Trippier: This information will be available in full only when the Housing Corporation have completed the annual regional allocation process to associations. I have therefore asked the Housing Corporation to respond to the hon. Member direct as soon as that process is completed.

Housing Act 1988

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many requests he has received under the provisions of the Housing Act 1988 to activate the process of opting out of local authority control by *(a)* housing associations, *(b)* private landlords, *(c)* local authorities, *(d)* tenants' groups or associations and *(e)* registered housing co-operatives; and if he will list them.

Mr. Trippier: None. The responsibility for approving landlords for the purposes of tenants' choice (part IV of the Act) lies with the Housing Corporation in England and with Housing for Wales in Wales.

Personal Data

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to introduce regulations

under the Local Government Finance Act that will allow charging authorities and community charges registration officers to use or disclose personal data for purposes other than those directly related to the community charge; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: No.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list the uses and disclosures of personal data that can currently be made by charging authorities and community charges registration officers for purposes other than those directly related to the community charge; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: An electoral registration officer may inspect the community charges register of any charging authority. Apart from that no personal data collected for the purposes of community charges registers may be disclosed for any purpose unconnected with the community charge.

Nuclear Waste (Imports)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the countries that send civil nuclear waste to the United Kingdom; and how such waste is moved in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no countries that send civil nuclear waste to the United Kingdom.

Council House Sales

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council properties have been sold to council house tenants in Doncaster metropolitan borough council as a whole since 1979 to date; and what proportion of the total stock of council properties these sales represent in each year since 1979.

Mr. Trippier: From April 1979 to September 1988 Doncaster metropolitan borough council reported selling 8,289 dwellings to is tenants. The sales represented the following percentages of the estimated stock at the start of each financial year.

	Percentage of Stock Sold to Sitting Tenants
1979-80	Nil
1980-81	0·2
1981-82	3·9
1982-83	8·3
1983-84	2·5
1984-85	1·7
1985-86	1·4
1986-87	1·3
1987-88	1·8
[1]1988-89	1·2

[1] Six months only.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the annual cost since 1979 for South Yorkshire of the publicity material promoting the right to buy council housing and flats; and if he will give in his answer the amount for each local authority.

Mr. Trippier: My answer of 6 March to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) at column *427*, gave the costs of national publicity to draw the attention of tenants to their right to buy their homes. The expenditure cannot be attributed to particular areas.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response has he received from Nottingham city council to his request for a progress report on implementing the community charge; if he will publish that response; and whether he has received any request for a future survey of costs incurred by the council in implementing the poll tax.

Mr. Gummer: We have received a progress report dated 26 January from the Nottingham city treasurer. As requested, it outlines the council's plans for staffing, accommodation, computing, etc. On the question of publication, I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr Cunningham) on 23 January 1989 at column *459*.

The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the reasons for publishing community charge practice note No. 16 on joint and several liability before community charge practice note 15 on enforcement; when practice note 15 will be published; and what are the reasons for the delay.

Mr. Ridley: Practice notes are prepared jointly by the Government and the local authority associations. They are published as they become ready, and no reason was seen to delay the note on joint and several liability, which was numbered 16 on our provisional schedule, simply because No. 15 was not yet ready. Discussions on the practice note on enforcement are taking place in the normal way, and it will be published once these are complete.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the remainder of the leaflets listed in the booklet entitled "You and the Community Charge", dealing with *(a)* the rebate scheme, *(b)* students and the community charge, *(c)* the community charge and second homes, *(d)* the collective community charge, *(e)* the appeal system and *(f)* the business rate, are to be made available.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* These are all in preparation and will be published variously over the next few weeks.

Colliery Slag Heaps

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responsibility he has for the redevelopment of former colliery slag heaps.

Mr. Chope: Responsibility for the redevelopment of former colliery slag heaps is a matter for the developer, subject to the usual planning controls. The Department does provide financial assistance towards the reclamation of derelict spoil heaps in appropriate cases, through the derelict land grant system.

Littlewoods Cup Final

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will visit the Nottingham Forest *v.* Luton Littlewoods cup final on Sunday.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend did not attend the cup final. However, my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning and I were present.

Rates

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will print in the *Official Report* the percentage rate increase in each English shire county between 1984-85 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

County council precepts percentage increase 1984-85 to 1989-90

	Per cent.
Avon	54·7
Bedfordshire	75·5
Berkshire	51·3
Buckinghamshire	71·4
Cambridgeshire	64·1
Cheshire	46·7
Cleveland	57·4
Cornwall	61·6
Cumbria	77·1
Derbyshire	64·0
Devon	59·6
Dorset	50·0
Durham	74·0
East Sussex	62·8
Essex	75·8
Gloucestershire	64·3
Hampshire	51·8
Hereford and Worcester	37·2
Hertfordshire	70·5
Humberside	73·6
Isle of Wight	71·2
Kent	52·3
Lancashire	69·7
Leicestershire	71·1
Lincolnshire	56·2
Norfolk	61·2
Northamptonshire	65·5
Northumberland	56·6
North Yorkshire	71·2
Nottinghamshire	52·8
Oxfordshire	77·2
Shropshire	67·9
Somerset	72·0
Staffordshire	53·2
Suffolk	53·5
Surrey	54·1
Warwickshire	76·1
West Sussex	54·2
Wiltshire	79·0

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by county the percentage annual rate rise from 1981 to 1985 and from 1985 to 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

County council precepts
Average annual percentage increases

	1981-82 to 1985-86	*1985-86 to 1989-90*
Avon	12·1	9·8
Bedfordshire	7·1	13·1
Berkshire	7·7	9·4
Buckinghamshire	6·0	12·8
Cambridgeshire	6·1	12·4
Cheshire	9·0	8·6
Cleveland	10·7	9·2
Cornwall	7·6	11·8
Cumbria	7·7	12·1
Derbyshire	13·6	11·8
Devon	8·0	11·3
Dorset	5·8	9·3
Durham	8·1	12·4
East Sussex	6·9	11·7
Essex	8·4	13·1
Gloucestershire	6·2	11·1
Hampshire	6·5	9·3
Hereford and Worcester	6·7	7·2
Hertfordshire	8·0	12·5
Humberside	12·4	13·4
Isle of Wight	8·4	12·3
Kent	6·8	9·7
Lancashire	6·9	11·5
Leicestershire	10·2	12·3
Lincolnshire	5·7	10·5
Norfolk	7·4	11·1
Northamptonshire	6·9	11·9
Northumberland	8·8	10·4
North Yorkshire	7·3	12·0
Nottinghamshire	14·3	8·9
Oxfordshire	6·6	13·2
Shropshire	6·2	12·0
Somerset	6·1	13·7
Staffordshire	10·7	8·7
Suffolk	6·0	10·2
Surrey	8·2	10·1
Warwickshire	6·8	13·6
West Sussex	7·0	9·4
Wiltshire	8·0	13·4

Chlorofluorocarbons

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of chlorofluorocarbons used in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what are the corresponding figures for chlorofluorocarbons substitutes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I regret that this information is not available.

Sulphur Emissions

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he expects in the levels of sulphur emissions in the United Kingdom as a whole over the coming decade; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government are determined to cut sulphur emissions, the largest single source of which is electricity generation. We have a firm commitment, embodied in the European Community's large combustion plants directive, to reduce sulphur emissions from existing power stations by 40 per cent. of the 1980 level by 1998. We have also adopted stringent standards for new plants.

Local Development Projects

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what local development projects have been undertaken in England; and what are their costs.

Mr. Trippier: "Local development projects" does not, in England, refer to any identifiable group of projects.

Methane Gas (Landfill Sites)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will name the landfill sites identified in the waste management paper No. 27 published in January where a potential danger from methane gas has been identified.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Waste management paper No. 27 is a technical memorandum on methods for dealing with landfill gas. A site survey is presently being conducted by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in conjunction with local authorities and results will be published as soon as possible.

Water Authority Land Holdings

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements have been made for a review of water authority land holdings.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend has appointed, jointly with the nine water authorities in England, the following firms of surveyors, to carry out a review of land holdings:

Anglian water authority—Jones Lang Wootton
Northumbrian water authority—Sanderson Townend and Gilbert
North West water authority—Grimley J. R. Eve
Severn Trent water authority—Bernard Thorpe and Partners
Southern water authority—Hillier Parker
South West water authority—Chesterton
Thames water authority—Healey and Baker and St. Quintin
Wessex water authority—J. P. Sturge and Sons
Yorkshire water authority—Savills

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has appointed the firm of Gerald Eve, jointly with the Welsh water authority. This review will help ensure that the prospectuses of the new water public limited companies contain any information about the land which is relevant to investors' decisions on whether to apply for shares.

Water plcs (Share Applications)

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to counter fraudulent applications for shares in the new water plcs.

Mr. Howard: My right hon. Friend has appointed the firm of Price Waterhouse to advise on procedures for preventing and detecting fraudulent share applications when the water authorities are privatised later this year.

North West Water Authority

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received about the sale of the Turton/Belmont estate by the North West water authority; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy to make consent to the North West water authority sale of land on the Turton/Belmont Estate tenanted by the Dunscar Golf Club Ltd. for less than the best price conditional on the offer to that golf club of the parcel of land of which it is tenant for a commercially acceptable price.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* I have received five letters expressing concern about the sale. The authority does not need my consent if it obtains best price. Otherwise, it is for the authority concerned to apply for consent to dispose of land if it believes this is required. I have received no such application from North West water in respect of the Turton/Belmont estate.

House Prices

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to what was the annual rate of increase for house prices in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Calderdale in 1988.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* Between the last quarters of 1987 and 1988 the price of houses bought with building society mortgages rose at an annual rate of 34 per cent. for the United Kingdom as a whole. Information is not available for Calderdale but the regional index for Yorkshire and Humberside rose by 39 per cent. over the same period.

Eastbourne Waterworks Company

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what amount the Eastbourne Waterworks Company has increased its charges since 1 January; which water companies have increased their charges since that date by a larger amount; what powers he has to afford protection to the customers of the Eastbourne Waterworks Company against the price increase; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* I am writing to my hon. Friend today.

London Residuary Body

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will remove Mr. Michael Roberts from his position as a part-time member of the London residuary body; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* No.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what qualifications he took into account when appointing Mr. Michael Roberts a part-time member of the London residuary body.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* Particular account was taken of Mr. Roberts' financial expertise.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why he has refused to accept a nomination from the Association of London Authorities to membership of the London residuary body; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not aware of any recent nomination from the Association of London Authorities. He is always prepared to consider suggestions for appointments.

Greater London Council Heritage Collection

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the items proposed by the

London residuary body to be transferred from the Greater London council's heritage collection to the corporation of the City of London; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if his Department has given consent to the transfer of items from the Greater London council's heritage collection to the City of London under the terms of section 67(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1985 as amended by section 162(2)(c) of the Education Reform Act 1988; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what proposals he has received from the London residuary body in respect of the Greater London council's heritage collection under the terms of section 67(1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1985 as amended; and what decisions he has made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The London residuary body has proposed the substantive transfer of portraits and paintings to the Corporation of the City of London. We have made no decisions yet.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of the deed of gift made between the London residuary body and the City of London in respect of items transferred from the Greater London council's heritage collection.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The Corporation of the City of London has agreed to make items reasonably available to the public either by display or, if stored, by inspection on request. Items may also be loaned for public exhibitions.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice was given by his Department to the London residuary body in respect of the transfer of items from the Greater London council's heritage collection to the City of London.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* No advice was sought or given.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of the loan agreement between the London residuary body and the City of London in respect of items from the Greater London council's heritage collection.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Terms relate inter alia, to insurance, safe custody, conservation, public display, inspection of stored items, loans for public exhibition and return to the LRB in the event of a permanent transfer not being effected.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what items have been transferred from the Greater London council's heritage collection by the London residuary body to the Victoria and Albert museum.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Three items have been given to the Victoria and Albert museum: an embroidered panel entitled "Flint" by Diana Springall, a porcelain polar bear, and a Victorian carved corner chair.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of each item from the Greater London council's heritage collection sold by the London residuary body at auction: and how much was realised for each item and in total.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Four items realised in all a sum of £30,195: an antique bookcase, an antique desk and two clocks.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the items transferred from the Greater London council's heritage collection by the London residuary body to *(a)* the London borough of Bromley and *(b)* the Thames Water authority; and what price was paid for each item in total.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* Trophies and memorabilia related to Crystal palace were given to the London borough of Bromley as functional successor to the GLC for Crystal palace. A painting of the Thames barrier was given to the Thames water authority as functional successor to the GLC for the Thames barrier.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each of the bodies which have received or are likely to receive items from the Greater London council's heritage collection since 1 April 1986.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding reply 4 April 1989]:* The London borough of Bromley, the Corporation of the City of London, the London borough of Harrow, the Inner London education authority, the London fire and civil defence authority, the Thames water authority, the Victoria and Albert museum, and the purchasers of items disposed of at auction.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Tanzania

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussion his Department is having with the Government of Tanzania to develop a joint project for the mining of coal in that country.

Mr. Chris Patten: No such discussions are taking place at present. The Government of Tanzania have not raised this issue with us.

Kampuchea

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guarantees he has received that the United Kingdom aid provided for the Kampuchean refugee camps in Thailand goes only to those camps to which the United Nations has access and that no United Kingdom aid, either bilateral or multilateral, goes to camps controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Chris Patten: Our assistance, which is provided through the relevant United Nations agencies, is subject to the stipulation that it should go only to the occupants of those camps controlled by the non-Communist elements of the Cambodian resistance. We have received assurances that this stipulation is observed.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will increase the United Kingdom contribution to the UNBRO education and training for Kampuchean refugees in camps in Thailand.

Mr. Chris Patten: I did so last month by increasing our 1988-89 contribution to UNBRO by £100,000 to £350,000 following an appeal for additional funds based on increased requirements in the camps.

SCOTLAND

Funding Sources

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list sources of funding to which organisations previously funded by the Manpower Services Commission may apply for assistance.

Mr. Lang: The availability of assistance for any particular organisation will depend on its functions and the particular projects in which it is involved.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will list the uses and disclosures of personal data that can currently be made by charging authorities and community charges registration officers for purposes other than those directly related to the community charge; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Personal data collected for community charges purposes can only be disclosed through inspection of community charges register. The register is available for inspection to the extent specified and for the purposes set out in section 20 of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended by the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and in regulation 16 of the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 1988.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland have *(a)* registered and *(b)* not registered for the poll tax; how many have (i) paid and (ii) not paid the poll tax; and how many are currently undergoing court proceedings.

Mr. Lang: Registration for and payment of the community charges are matters for individual community charges registration officers and levying authorities (regional and islands councils) respectively and the information requested is not held centrally. However, I understand from figures provided by them that registration is estimated to be approaching 99 per cent. of the adult population. Local authorities have published no figures regarding payment levels.

Head Teachers

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland over each of the 10 years from 1978 to 1988 how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female head teachers of schools in Scotland have left for the following reasons: *(a)* normal retirement, *(b)* early retirement, specifying the various reasons for this, *(c)* death in service, and *(d)* death within five years of retirement; and how many in each category were from (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools, (iii) special schools and (iv) other schools.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is not available.

Sports Clubs

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what provision is made for rates relief for sports clubs in Scotland;

(2) what additional funds have been made available to Scottish local authorities to enable sports clubs to obtain 100 per cent. rate relief.

Mr. Lang: Full account is taken of the relief that each local authority plans to give to sports clubs when calculating that authority's entitlement to revenue support grant. The cost of such relief in rate income forgone and in extra grant for 1989-90 is estimated to be £3 million.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings he has had since 1 April on the implementation, registration and collection of the poll tax in England and Wales.

Mr. Lang: None.

Health Boards

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen and general managers of health boards; and what subjects were discused.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As part of my regular pattern of meetings I met the chairmen of health boards and of the Common Services Agency on 10 March, when we discussed a wide range of issues relating to the National Health Service in Scotland. I do not regularly meet the general managers as a group, though the Scottish Home and Health Department does.

Children's Playgrounds

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list in the *Official Report* those regulations which govern safety requirements in children's playgrounds belonging to local authorities;

(2) what requirements are imposed on local authorities to ensure that local authorities play areas have yielding ground surfaces below playground equipment including swings and climbing frames;

(3) what guidance has been given to local authorities regarding safety surfaces in local authority play areas;

(4) what plans he has to introduce requirements to lay safety surfaces on local authority playgrounds.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no regulations governing safety requirements or safety surfaces in children's playgrounds belonging to local authorities. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires all playground operators to take all reasonable measures to ensure the safety of such facilities and to report certain accidents to the Health and Safety Executive, which enforces the Act. Additionally, a number of British standards apply to playground surfaces and equipment. I have no plans for further requirements or guidance to local authorities.

Historic Churches

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to introduce a scheme to assist the Church of Scotland to retain historic churches no longer used for acts of worship and which would otherwise be liable to be demolished; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Churches in Scotland of any denomination may receive historic building repair grant for repairs and restoration, if they are of outstanding

architectural merit or historic interest. Where a church is no longer used for worship, grant is available to encourage a prospective purchaser to restore the building for a new purpose. Over the past 10 years repair grants awarded to former churches for which new uses have been found have amounted to about £2 million.

Road Signs

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement outlining current criteria used to determine which forward destinations are shown on road direction signs on primary routes in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: First, places are selected as being of traffic importance because of their value as reference points for drivers to assist them to find the most satisfactory route on long journeys. They are then classed as either super-primary destinations (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness only) or primary destinations (all others). As a rule advance direction signs should contain only one place name for each direction and on primary routes this should be the next primary destination along the immediate route. A super-primary destination may also appear. This rule is not applied so rigidly as to impair the effectiveness of the signing system and occasionally additional primary destinations may appear.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* all places of traffic importance in the Borders region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: They are Coldstream, Galashiels, Hawick, Jedburgh and Peebles.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the road signposting of the town of Hawick on that part of the A7 in the Dumfries and Galloway region and on the M6 to be carried out.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: When the proposal to signpost Hawick was agreed in June 1986 it was on the basis of a gradual programme to implement the necessary sign changes over five years, with priority for replacement of these groups of signs that were in the worst state of repair.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* locations of primary route signs situated to the south of the town of Hawick which show *(a)* Hawick and *(b)* Galashiels as a place of traffic importance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Work on amending signposting to the south of Hawick to show Hawick as a place of traffic importance has not yet started in Dumfries and Galloway or Cumbria. However, Hawick has been added to a route confirmatory sign 1½ miles south of Hawick and to an advance direction sign at the A7/B711 junction, both in Borders region. Galashiels appears on primary route signs at the following locations:

Cumbria

M6/A7	Junction 44 (for travellers on A7 northbound, A74 southbound and approaching from Brampton/Carlisle Airport).
A7	Harker Park.
A7	Blackford (south end and St. John the Baptist Parish Church).
A7	West Linton.
A7/A6071	Longtown (north and south).
A7	Oakbank.

Dumfries and Galloway

A7/B7201	Canonbie.
A7/B6357	Canonbie.
A7/B720	Hollows.
A7/B6318	Skipper's Bridge.
A7/B7068	Langholm.
A7/C76A	Whitsheils.
A7/C78A	Sorbie.
A7/C77A	Fiddleton Toll.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to list the town of Hawick as a place of traffic importance alongside the town of Galashiels on road signs from the north within the Lothian region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I agreed last month that Hawick should be included alongside Galashiels on road signs from the north within Lothian region.

Petrochemical Development (Peterhead)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the development of the North Collielaw site in Peterhead by petrochemical companies; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend is not aware of any such proposals at present. Any proposal would be subject to normal planning procedures and, in the first instance, would be the responsibility of Banff and Buchan district council as planning authority.

Sexual Assaults

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been tried in Scotland for sexual assaults of all kinds for each of the past five years for which figures are available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information available is given in the table:

Year	*Persons called to court*	*Persons tried following a plea of not guilty*
1983	197	103
1984	182	94
1985	221	126
1986	234	127
1987	225	116

The term "sexual assaults" includes rape, assault with intent to rape and indecent assault.

Toll Charges

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to private funding for a new motorway between Edinburgh and the English border; and what is his policy concerning the imposition of toll charges on any part of the national road network.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No Government consideration is being given to private funding for a new motorway from the border to Edinburgh. My right hon. and learned Friend is aware that a possible extension to

Scotland of a proposed east coast motorway project from Cambridge to Teesside was mooted to Scottish local authorities by the group of promoting local authorities in England. He understands that the Scottish authorities approached are unlikely to favour considering an extension.

As to toll charges on any part of the national road network, there are, of course, charges already on, for example, the Forth, Tay and Erskine bridges. Tolls can be an appropriate means of meeting all or part of capital costs.

Prisoners

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* successful escapes and *(b)* unsuccessful escape attempts there have been from prisons in Scotland by category A prisoners in each of the last 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The information is set out in the table.

Year	*Prison*	*Escapes*	*Attempted escapes*
1979	Perth	1	—
1980	—	—	—
1981	—	—	—
1982	Peterhead	3	1
1983	Peterhead	—	1
1984	—	—	—
1985	Peterhead	—	3
1986	Inverness	—	2
1987	—	—	—
1988	—	—	—

WALES

Valleys Initiative

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations he has received concerning the voluntary work content of the valleys initiative programme; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations his Department has undertaken with regard to the voluntary effort content of the valleys initiative programme;

(3) if he will make a statement on the progress of the voluntary effort content of the valleys initiative programme.

Mr. Peter Walker: Representations have been received from the Wales Council for Voluntary Action and the Mid Glamorgan Association of Voluntary Organisations about community development activity and the development of voluntary services generally in the valleys.

Consultations are taking place with the county associations of voluntary organisations in Gwent, Mid Glamorgan and West Glamorgan to agree a programme of action for which £100,000 has been set aside in 1989-90. This is in addition to the substantial voluntary sector funding already made available under other headings.

The urban programme is continuing to provide very substantial support for a wide range of voluntary schemes including those concerned with social services, environmental improvement and business support and advice. In 1989-90 allocations to voluntary schemes benefiting the valleys will total £3 million.

Good progress is also being made with other schemes identified in the programme and being undertaken by the Community Projects Foundation, Groundwork Foundation, Prince of Wales Committee and UK2000, all of which are expected to make an important contribution in the valleys.

Housing

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures his Department is taking to ensure that changes in his Department's financial provision for housing associations allow the associations in Wales to continue to provide housing for rent to tenants on low wages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The Welsh Office is particularly concerned about the situation facing people on low incomes in Wales. We have accordingly secured Treasury agreement that there will be no maximum rate of housing association grant in Wales this year. This will give Housing for Wales the flexibility that it needs to progress schemes which reflect local needs and costs in every area in Wales and for all categories of people in housing need.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy with regard to the promotion of low-cost home ownership schemes in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We have asked Housing for Wales for this year to give particular attention to low-cost home ownership schemes, particularly in rural areas. Welsh Office officials have also recently secured a significantly higher value limit for shared ownership schemes as it is important that this type of development should continue throughout the Principality.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the number of dwellings owned, *(b)* the number of dwellings built, *(c)* the number of dwellings sold and *(d)* the number of dwellings purchased from the private sector, in each year since 1980 by each housing authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not readily available and I will reply as soon as possible.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the details of each request he has received from housing authorities for special loans to allow them to purchase dwellings from the private sector.

Mr. Grist: The Welsh Office has received bids totalling £1·2 million from the following district authorities:

Aberconwy
Arfon
Ceredigion
Dwyfor
Isle of Anglesey
Montgomeryshire
Preseli (Pembs)

We are currently considering the applications and hope to announce the actual allocations shortly.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many second homes there are in each district authority area in Wales; and in each case what percentage of the total housing stock they represent.

Mr. Grist: Estimates of the number of second homes alone are not available. The Welsh inter-censal survey,

however, provides an assessment of the percentage of homes identified as definite or presumed second/holiday homes. These figures are given in the following table:

Second and Holiday Homes 1986

	Number of Second and Holiday Homes	*Second and Holiday Homes as per cent. of District Stock (a)*
Alyn and Deeside	50	—
Colwyn	960	4
Delyn	280	1
Glyndwr	690	4
Rhuddlan	480	2
Wrexham Maelor	100	—
Carmarthen	490	2
Ceredigion	1,570	6
Dinefwr	290	2
Llanelli	120	—
Preseli	1,950	7
South Pembrokeshire	1,510	9
Blaenau Gwent	50	—
Islwyn	20	—
Monmouth	130	—
Newport	100	—
Torfaen	80	—
Aberconwy	2,040	9
Arfon	1,380	6
Dwyfor	2,860	21
Meirionnydd	3,200	20
Ynys Mon	1,760	6
Cynon Valley	70	—
Merthyr Tydfil	0	—
Ogwr	50	—
Rhondda	20	—
Rhymney Valley	20	—
Taff-Ely	100	—
Brecknock	650	4
Montgomeryshire	1,040	5
Radnor	410	4
Cardiff	50	—
Vale of Glamorgan	260	1
Lliw Valley	70	—
Neath	0	—
Port Talbot (Afan)	40	—
Swansea	460	1
WALES	23,340	2

(a)—indicates 0·5 per cent. or less.
Source: Welsh Inter-Censal Survey 1986.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are on the waiting lists for accommodation of each housing authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The information is not collected centrally.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are on each housing authority's waiting list for improvement grants in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The number of home improvement grant applications outstanding at the end of December 1988 is given in the following table:

Grant applications outstanding at 31 December 1988

	Improvement and conversion	*Repairs*	*Intermediate*	*Special*	*All grants*
Aberconwy	29	21	4	6	60
Alyn and Deeside	26	72	0	0	98
Arfon	97	239	1	1	338
Blaenau Gwent	1,206	3,153	156	0	4,515
Brecknock	62	342	31	0	435
Cardiff	1,888	2,994	334	159	5,375
Carmarthen	220	372	4	2	598
Ceredigion	131	866	36	0	1,033
Colwyn	172	77	0	4	253
Cynon Valley	180	1,774	1,581	0	3,535
Delyn	12	62	4	0	78
Dinefwr	23	276	1	0	300
Dwyfor	55	388	23	2	468
Glyndwr	174	184	60	0	418
Islwyn	14	157	0	0	171
Llanelli	24	327	7	0	358
Lliw Valley	45	207	23	0	275
Meirionnydd	1	4	2	0	7
Merthyr Tydfil	10	235	50	0	295
Monmouth	3	0	0	0	3
Montgomeryshire	21	71	16	0	108
Neath	221	472	20	1	714
Newport	632	1,554	47	24	2,257
Ogwr	300	774	36	48	1,158
Port Talbot (Afan)	178	1,196	14	0	1,388
Preseli	904	1,009	2	2	1,917
Radnor	89	190	21	0	300
Rhondda	1,196	3,461	1,229	0	5,886
Rhuddlan	63	19	1	0	83
Rhymney Valley	374	2,237	78	0	2,689
South Pembrokeshire	161	72	6	0	239
Swansea	891	658	45	27	1,621
Taff-Ely	141	151	26	41	359
Torfaen	229	719	293	0	1,241
Vale of Glamorgan	8	926	3	2	939
Wrexham Maelor	65	260	22	0	347
Ynys Mon	19	25	9	0	53
WALES TOTAL	9,864	25,544	4,185	319	39,912

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average price of each category of dwelling in each district authority area in Wales; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: Average dwelling prices are not available by district. The average dwelling prices by type of dwelling for Wales as a whole are shown in the following table:

Average private sector dwelling prices by type of dwelling: Wales

£000's

Year	Bungalow	Detached house	Semi-detached house	Terraced house	Flat or maisonette in converted house	Purpose built flat or maisonette	All dwellings
1979	18·5	26·0	15·6	11·4	13·2	11·5	17·1
1980	21·5	29·6	18·3	13·6	16·1	17·0	19·4
1981	23·5	32·1	18·7	14·5	12·0	17·0	20·2
1982	22·8	33·7	18·3	14·6	17·1	13·1	19·7
1983	26·7	36·5	20·5	15·9	19·5	16·5	22·5
1984	27·1	37·2	22·0	17·6	15·4	19·2	23·7
1985	30·2	41·4	22·3	18·3	17·1	19·8	25·0
1986	34·8	42·4	25·5	19·8	18·9	25·2	27·4
1987	36·8	48·7	26·3	21·3	22·6	26·5	29·7
1988	42·4	59·3	30·1	25·7	24·3	27·3	34·2

Source: Sample Survey of Building Society Mortgages, DOE.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total per capita public spending on housing in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each district authority area in Wales; and what are the corresponding figures for each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: The total per capita public spending on housing by local authority, excluding housing benefit, any expenditure by the Housing Corporation and advances under the Housing and Small Dwellings Acquisition Act, for each local authority and for Wales, for each financial year since 1979-80 is shown in the following table:

Local authority gross expenditure on housing per capita

	1979-80 £/head	1980-81 £/head	1981-82 £/head	1982-83 £/head	1983-84 £/head	1984-85 £/head	1985-86 £/head	1986-87 £/head	Provisional 1987-88 £/head
Alyn and Deeside	36·65	50·97	48·68	74·88	78·30	80·07	71·42	82·49	88·23
Colwyn	60·87	61·45	47·88	58·51	75·37	56·02	63·14	71·56	56·04
Delyn	48·34	48·14	53·85	62·65	74·14	60·59	61·89	80·96	85·32
Glyndwr	59·80	66·65	63·06	71·64	98·99	93·75	70·87	76·98	78·74
Rhuddlan	28·69	25·99	29·51	39·97	63·23	40·86	38·07	41·78	49·87
Wrexham Maelor	50·58	60·91	57·94	68·91	84·61	78·46	89·43	106·09	112·84
Carmarthen	77·27	70·30	79·22	106·44	209·08	117·92	102·11	116·40	145·68
Ceredigion	54·06	69·78	59·56	73·41	148·99	85·98	78·11	87·01	78·64
Dinefwr	51·50	49·73	41·40	60·28	96·10	74·79	65·24	75·89	85·91
Llanelli	72·87	63·43	54·47	68·49	108·30	102·24	95·10	100·19	114·04
Preseli Pembrokeshire	55·89	52·09	70·34	82·48	106·14	103·88	84·15	98·21	98·14
South Pembroke	67·91	71·38	63·75	85·41	134·09	134·06	102·86	96·08	140·29
Blaenau Gwent	127·67	157·64	115·16	182·66	221·86	181·98	149·33	215·14	245·63
Islwyn	87·02	92·12	82·14	122·88	169·67	169·41	137·36	192·33	241·41
Monmouth	57·86	60·60	66·74	87·89	127·55	95·42	112·28	128·49	145·89
Newport	89·18	90·18	95·21	119·50	156·08	125·49	139·75	148·96	190·47
Torfaen	84·12	77·18	80·54	121·85	129·43	120·39	105·03	178·64	190·91
Aberconwy	44·25	52·36	43·67	57·99	90·61	79·60	72·20	69·19	72·64
Arfon	58·26	78·11	83·21	87·79	136·13	108·97	99·34	106·43	116·10
Dwyfor	40·37	44·46	39·47	62·06	144·77	83·67	64·18	61·68	60·15
Meirionnydd	63·14	54·99	56·54	72·24	159·27	152·64	82·75	87·82	61·98
Ynys Môn	71·73	70·11	50·66	70·35	143·63	76·95	75·47	95·33	103·13
Cynon Valley	70·22	62·67	65·90	79·35	109·39	81·71	85·72	115·83	161·33
Merthyr Tydfil	108·93	97·93	80·46	92·96	132·91	107·66	103·53	127·49	174·92
Ogwr	73·30	66·69	62·94	74·23	107·63	101·97	81·54	90·50	69·05
Rhondda	100·66	96·93	92·63	119·35	203·16	196·69	139·19	165·95	204·32
Rhymney Valley	79·65	88·32	77·99	102·06	118·39	117·73	95·46	130·45	178·16
Taff Ely	82·70	81·56	88·93	109·08	154·94	102·42	84·52	113·48	136·36
Brecknock	50·12	48·00	49·32	51·46	95·03	66·15	68·81	86·37	83·35
Montgomeryshire	35·21	50·84	36·17	51·10	105·66	67·03	60·99	74·36	86·36
Radnor	41·70	51·61	46·25	91·55	118·22	68·20	66·09	72·73	81·27
Cardiff	76·54	76·64	82·47	99·17	152·80	117·31	123·56	130·02	170·59
Vale of Glamorgan	53·30	55·15	43·67	71·92	86·16	67·34	51·52	90·22	80·07
Port Talbot	54·93	58·92	59·96	89·35	125·88	119·69	102·88	150·96	222·79
Lliw Valley	89·14	80·97	73·31	95·05	111·13	87·55	89·26	103·20	119·65
Neath	51·92	53·86	60·46	92·88	116·69	87·29	94·39	112·65	135·25
Swansea	55·15	63·75	68·20	89·19	112·41	109·94	99·87	110·55	108·65
Total Wales	68·46	70·82	68·40	89·39	126·58	104·20	95·08	114·35	131·43

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the total receipts from the sale of dwellings from their stock by each housing authority in Wales in each year

since the inception of the right-to-buy policy; and what proportion of those receipts was allocated to the housing budget in each case.

Mr. Grist: The total receipts from the sale of local authority dwellings in Wales for the period requested is shown in the table. The proportion of those receipts allocated to the housing budget is not held centrally.

Local authority capital receipts from sale of dwellings

£ thousand

Local authority	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*[1]
Alyn and Deeside	528	218	262	258	385	684	762
Colwyn	728	663	529	415	544	585	713
Delyn	753	436	318	301	n/a	621	1,046
Glyndwr	782	890	456	254	428	540	585
Rhuddlan	409	316	326	299	196	340	673
Wrexham Maelor	1,997	1,244	467	464	820	1,259	1,669
Carmarthen	1,631	1,269	919	880	528	670	804
Caredigion	1,562	1,858	1,141	783	538	924	791
Dinefwr	700	544	276	220	364	634	596
Llanelli	1,562	1,545	1,813	974	672	897	1,234
Preseli	2,548	1,326	1,376	822	832	753	981
South Pembroke	277	1,110	1,416	562	440	n/a	722
Blaenau Gwent	935	1,313	756	507	n/a	1,274	1,429
Islwyn	1,652	8,274	2,702	1,615	1,433	2,064	2,270
Monmouth	690	864	1,326	1,431	1,296	1,422	2,263
Newport	1,217	1,421	1,726	1,727	2,250	3,326	2,668
Torfaen	2,688	2,750	1,921	2,137	1,220	4,644	3,393
Aberconwy	1,080	1,206	697	464	526	663	629
Arfon	1,006	639	457	491	363	475	489
Dwyfor	526	506	235	129	189	111	95
Meirionnydd	569	1,081	618	293	239	257	419
Ynys Mon	1,081	974	382	344	753	605	579
Cynon Valley	529	1,048	461	465	386	731	763
Merthyr Tydfil	1,361	1,732	978	670	1,103	1,411	1,706
Ogwr	1,229	2,982	1,614	1,370	1,601	2,486	3,054
Rhondda	362	171	191	132	243	365	375
Rhymney Valley	1,884	2,487	1,711	1,258	1,158	2,310	2,159
Taff Ely	1,056	936	1,694	1,378	1,363	2,067	2,838
Brecknock	1,838	830	915	831	768	n/a	988
Montgomeryshire	1,779	1,183	698	452	530	846	562
Radnor	692	658	655	246	272	215	522
Cardiff	1,312	5,089	2,239	583	3,777	7,224	5,600
Vale of Glamorgan	1,127	1,836	1,936	1,485	1,228	2,215	1,970
Port Talbot	803	1,483	1,607	1,197	1,481	1,917	2,363
Lliw Valley	598	1,262	508	401	670	877	998
Neath	1,604	970	417	536	532	971	1,366
Swansea	1,067	1,629	1,267	1,139	1,557	2,141	3,545
Total Wales	42,142	54,743	35,743	27,513	48,522	48,522	53,619

[1]Provisional.
n/a = Not available.
Source: Capital Outurn Return.

Health Service

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total amount of money raised towards the work of each hospital in Wales from voluntary and charitable sources since 1979.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been raised through public appeals, donations and other voluntary and charitable sources towards the cost of each whole body scanner purchased for National Health Service use in Wales since 1979.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held centrally.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which National Health Service hospitals in Wales at present have whole body scanner facilities; when the equipment was installed in each case; and which hospitals are planned to be provided with such facilities anew or to replace obsolete facilities.

Mr. Grist: The following hospitals in Wales have whole body scanning facilities installed as shown:

Hospital	*Year of installation*
East Glamorgan Hospital, Church Village	1988
Llandough Hospital, Penarth	1988
Morriston Hospital, Swansea	1986
Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny	1987
Royal Gwent Hospital, Newport	1987
Singleton Hospital, Swansea	1989
University Hospital of Wales	1984 and 1987
Velindre Hospital, Cardiff	1988
West Wales General Hospital, Carmarthen	1987
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd, Rhyl	1987
Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor	1988
Ysbyty Maelor, Wrexham	1987

The Welsh Office has at present no plans to provide additional whole body scanning facilities although their availability and disposition is to be reviewed. It will be for health authorities to make appropriate arrangements for the replacement of equipment.

Dr. Thomas: to ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether all outstanding disputes with developers and contractors engaged in work on ysbyty Gwynedd have now been resolved satisfactorily; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: All disputes with the designers for this hospital scheme have been resolved but there remain outstanding disputes with contractors for the works.

The Welsh Health Common Services Authority continues to withhold £130,000 from IDC Ltd. to pay for remedial work to windows and cavities in the residential buildings, where further remedial work may be necessary to modify some staircase balustrades and to repair defective wall ties. Liability for these items has not yet been determined.

In the main hospital buildings there are items in dispute associated with the quality of the floor screeds in ground floor circulation areas and with the adequacy of fixings for suspended ceilings. These items are the subject of negotiations presently with the main building contractor Kyle Steward Ltd.

Welsh Language

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is undertaking to ensure that a sufficient number of qualified teachers are available in Wales in order to implement the provisions of the Education Act 1988 relating to the teaching of the Welsh language.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Work is in hand to estimate the number of teachers who will be needed to teach Welsh in the national curriculum. Officials have met local education authority representatives to discuss how the Welsh language provisions of the national curriculum are to be delivered and these discussions will continue. It is clear that the teaching capacity which will be needed must be met, to a large extent, by a programme of in-service training for existing teachers. Teachers training colleges will play an important part in delivering this in-service training programme.

The local education authorities training grant scheme includes a national priority category for Welsh language training. In 1989-90 grant is available towards expenditure of £223,000 under this category. Further funding is also being provided from other Welsh Office programmes to assist authorities to increase their present in-service training provision.

The teaching as a career unit (TASC) and its Welsh-speaking field officer for Wales are making particular efforts to persuade more Welsh speakers to train as teachers. This includes young people leaving school or colleges, and also more mature people seeking a change of career or married women wishing to take up employment.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether the financial resources allocated for the coming year to the Welsh language education development committee will be sufficient to allow it to undertake its work during that period; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The resources allocated for 1989-90 are sufficient to meet the Welsh language education development committee's running costs and to undertake a programme for the development of Welsh language education which accords with educational needs. The grant offer has been accepted by the committee. In so far as the committee's proposals were not consistent with the needs of the national curriculum, or would have duplicated activity already being undertaken, or were deficient in other respects, they did not receive support. Other proposals needed further development taking account of work being undertaken by other bodies and of the extent of existing provision. Proposals for research are still receiving consideration.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase funding for the Welsh language development committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The funding for the Welsh language education development committee and for its proposed work programme increased from £248,000 last year to £669,000 this year. As previously announced, additional resources are available to support further work on the development of Welsh language education, and discussions on this are continuing. Funding for future years will be decided taking account of the merits of future proposals and the availability of resources.

Roads

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress and future plans for the improvement of the A470.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is set out in "Roads in Wales 1989: Progress and Plans for the 1990s", which was published on 10 April.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was his Department's total expenditure on roads in each year since 1979 in *(a)* each parliamentary constituency in Wales and *(b)* each district authority area.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This information is not available in the form requested.

Homelessness

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the numbers of people presented as homeless and accepted as homeless in each district authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The latest available information relates to the final quarter of 1988. The number of households presented as homeless and accepted as homeless in that period are given in the table:

Number of households presented and accepted as homeless October—December 1988

Welsh Districts	*Presented*	*Accepted*
Aberconwy	50	16
Alyn and Deeside	67	44
Arfon	4	2
Blaenau Gwent	75	63
Brecknock	21	18
Cardiff	354	317
Carmarthen	14	14
Ceredigion	32	11
Colwyn	6	2
Cynon Valley	135	67
Delyn	123	72
Dinefwr	19	19
Dwyfor	28	10

Welsh Districts	Presented	Accepted
Glyndwr	3	3
Islwyn	44	21
Llanelli	24	24
Lliw Valley	16	9
Meirionnydd	24	22
Merthyr Tydfil	21	21
Monmouth	93	48
Montgomery	8	8
Neath	87	87
Newport	159	158
Ogwr	125	118
Port Talbot	108	32
Preseli	16	13
Radnor	6	2
Rhondda	47	47
Rhuddlan	24	20
Rhymney Valley	78	66
S. Pembrokeshire	23	18
Swansea	147	43
Taff-Ely	121	36
Torfaen	175	119
Vale of Glamorgan	111	76
Wrexham Maelor	220	113
Ynys Mon	19	6
Wales Total	2,627	1,765

(a) under part III of the Housing Act 1985.

North-South Transport Links

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's progress and plans to improve transport links between north and south Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on road links is set out in "Roads in Wales 1989: Progress and Plans for the 1990s" published on 10 April. Public transport services are a matter for British Rail and for the county councils and public service operators.

Labour Statistics

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average annual salary of *(a)* all men in full-time employment, *(b)* all women in full-time employment and *(c)* all in full-time employment in (i) Wales, (ii) each county in Wales and (iii) each district in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information for annual average earnings is not collected. The new earnings survey results giving data for average gross weekly earnings are given in the following table. District data are not available.

Average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees on adult rates —whose earnings were not affected by absence. April 1988

	Male £	Female £	All £
Clwyd	220·0	139·1	195·9
Dyfed[1]	200·4	145·7	181·2
Gwent	218·8	150·7	197·8
Gwynedd	204·0	147·7	187·3
Mid Glamorgan	221·5	149·4	198·5
Powys	191·2	[3]	182·2
South Glamorgan	224·9	161·3	203·1
West Glamorgan[2]	220·7	145·9	199·6
Wales	217·8	150·3	196·5

[1] Excluding Llanelli.
[2] Including Llanelli.
[3] Data not publishable due to low sample numbers giving a high standard error.
Source: New earnings survey April 1988.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current rate of unemployment in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* each travel-to-work area in Wales and *(c)* each district authority area in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Wales at 9 February 1989 was 8·9 per cent.

Information on the travel-to-work areas in Wales is shown in the following tables:

Travel-to-work area	Unemployment rate (Per cent.)[1]
Aberdare	17·5
Aberystwyth	8·1
Bangor and Caernarfon	13·3
Blaenau Gwent and Abergavenny	13·8
Brecon	6·1
Bridgend	10·5
Cardiff	9·1
Cardigan	18·0
Carmarthen	6·7
Conwy and Colwyn	11·6
Denbigh	8·0
Dolgellau and Barmouth	11·1
Fishguard	16·1
Haverfordwest	14·0
Holyhead	17·7
Lampeter and Aberaeron	13·2
Llandeilo	9·7
Llandrindod Wells	7·3
Llanelli	12·3
Machynlleth	11·9
Merthyr nd Rhymney	14·1
Monmouth	10·5
Neath and Port Talbot	10·1
Newport	9·5
Newtown	6·0
Pontypool and Cwmbran	10·9
Pontypridd and Rhondda	12·1
Porthmadoc and Ffestiniog	10·8
Pwllheli	19·0
Shotton, Flint and Rhyl	10·6
South Pembrokeshire	17·6
Swansea	11·8
Welshpool	5·9
Wrexham	10·0

[1] Unemployment rates quoted are as at 9 February 1989, which are the latest available and are on a basis which does not take into account the self-employed, Her Majesty's forces and those on Government-related training schemes. The corresponding rate for Wales on this basis is 11·0 per cent.
Unemployment rates are not calculated for districts.

Lakes (Pollution)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total number of lakes in each county in Wales in which fish life is affected by acidification from acid rain and other sources.

Mr. Grist: No categoric answer can be given. Provisional results from a Welsh water authority pilot survey of 37 lakes in Gwynedd located in class I and II catchments (that is, vulnerable to acidification) show that between 8 and 21 per cent. are thought to have suffered fishery decline which could be acid water related.

Dairy Processing Industry

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those representations which he has received concerning the dairy processing industry in Wales since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Since 1983 I have received a number of representations about a range of issues affecting the dairy processing industry in Wales.

Open-cast Coal Sites

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the planning applications to develop open-cast coal sites submitted in 1987-88 in Wales were for *(a)* land, which at the time of the application, was being used for agriculture, *(b)* land which at the time of the application, was being used for forestry, *(c)* previously undisturbed countryside, *(d)* land which had previously been mined and *(e)* land which was already derelict due to previous industrial activity; and, in each case, if he will name the sites and the acreage involved.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available centrally.

Property Sales

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what role his Department played in the sales of former Dairy Crest creameries in Wales, closed since 1979.

Mr. Peter Walker: In addition to encouraging bodies such as the Welsh Development Agency and Mid Wales Development actively to seek alternative uses for the plants involved, my Department provided assistance, under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, to the new owners of the former Dairy Crest creameries at Llangefni, Felinfach and Newcastle Emlyn.

In the case of the creamery at Johnstown, the Welsh Development Agency sought and obtained my Department's approval to offer the new enterprise support under the rural conversion grant scheme.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps are taken by his Department to ensure that property sold in Wales by publicly-owned companies is sold to the buyer most likely to bring the greatest economic advantages to the area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Government's policy is that surplus land should be sold promptly at the current best price.

WINvest

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the number of inquiries received by WINvest for the nine last quarters for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Walker: WINvest has received many inquiries in the period under question, although the number involved has not been recorded. Inquiries are not considered to be a useful indicator of the genuine level of interest in Wales as a location for investment.

Woodlands

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all woodlands for each county in Wales which have been sold by the Forestry Commission in each of the last seven years indicating for each such woodland the *(a)* acreage, *(b)* grid reference and *(c)* species composition.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 9 March 1989]:* The information is given in the following tables:

Year	*Name*	*Area (hectares)*	*Grid Reference*	*Species**
Woodlands sold in Clwyd				
1982	Coed y Ffrith	8·1	SJ 138 750	C
1982	Land adjoining Cefn Rofft	1·0	SJ 008 498	C
1983	Dormitory Wood	3·0	SJ 060 728	B
1984	Big Covert	75·0	SJ 200 605	B
1984	Coed Jocelyn and Coed Salusbury	3·7	SJ 129 710	C
1984	Coed Wynne	2·3	SJ 134 715	C
1984	Coed y Moelfre	16·0	SJ 180 285	C
1984	Gop Hill	19·5	SJ 087 803	C
1984	Plas Nantyr	23·2	SJ 155 375	C
1984	Pontymeibion	2·0	SJ 198 351	C
1984	Ty Cerrig Wood	7·0	SJ 193 414	C
1984	Ochr y Fron	18·5	SJ 155 377	C
1984	Lower Blaen y Cwm	3·0	SJ 155 372	C
1984	Middle Blaen y Cum	0·3	SJ 153 372	C
1984	Blaen y Cwm Wood	1·4	SJ 151 372	C
1985	Bodrhyddan Woodlands Woodlands at Cwm Clwyd	21·0	SJ 075 765	C
1985	Coed Gaerwen	18·0	SJ 020 400	C
1985	Hafodunos	43·0	SH 860 677	C
1985	Land Adj Cefn Du Cyffylliog	0·6	SJ 045 547	C
1985	Pant yr Eos	9·0	SJ 180 285	C
1985	Pt Craignant Wd Bound Adj	1·8	SJ 244 345	C
1985	Pt Kinmel Estate Woods	11·6	SH 988 758	C
1986	Bodrhyddan Lot 4 Brior and Long Covert	6·0	SJ 075 765	C
1986	Bodrhyddan Woodlands Lot 1	130·0	SJ 075 765	C
1986	Bodrhyddan Woodlands Lot 3 Rhydorthwy Wen	3·0	SJ 075 765	C
1986	Coed Du and Coed Plas Wilkin	26·9	SJ 193 664	C
1986	Coed Duon	12·2	SJ 086 604	B
1986	Coed Moel Iago	19·9	SH 940 702	C
1986	Coed Nant Alyn	2·3	SJ 196 662	C

Year	Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
1986	Coed Nant Goch	7·7	SJ 083 608	B
1986	Coed Plas y Nant	29·3	SJ 160 577	C
1986	Coed Rhos Mostyn	3·8	SH 938 674	C
1986	Coed Sodom	8·3	SJ 100 723	C
1986	Coed y Fedw Cpt 522	12·4	SJ 200 617	C
1986	Fennis Wood	26·0	SJ 490 380	C
1986	Hafod Wood	24·2	SJ 001 687	C
1986	Oernant	5·4	SJ 190 468	C
1986	Plas Nantyr—Coed y Twmpath	9·0	SJ 155 375	C
1987	Bryn Gwenallt and Gopa Wood	47·5	SH 935 765	C
1987	Garth y Wig	26·0	SJ 044 492	C
1987	Land Adj Tan y Graig Boun	0·1	SJ 194 361	C
1987	Mostyn Dingle	14·5	SH 948 680	C
1987	Coed y Rhos	9·3	SJ 198 370	C
1988	Bodrhyddan Woods Lot 2 Coed Penymos	1·0	SJ 093 773	C
1988	Fedw Ithel and Coed y Fforest	16·0	SJ 099 591	C
1989	Coednant Barcutan	4·7	SJ 085 582	C
1989	Pwll Glas	5·3	SJ 112 543	C
Woodlands sold in Dyfed				
1982	Allt Disgwylfa and Wern Wood	20·0	SN 562 480	C
1982	Belan (Glyn Brochan)	18·0	SN 930 816	C
1982	Dyffryn Woods	6·5	SN 577 503	C
1982	Gafriw Dingle	17·3	SN 477 544	C
1982	Pant Meddyg	11·4	SN 482 467	C
1982	Pen-yr-allt Llwyd	2·0	SN 478 587	B
1982	Pt Windleway Wood	0·4	SN 249 121	B
1982	Ynys Felen Plantation	5·0	SN 493 545	C
1983	Caed/Brechfa Package:			
	Ty'r Cwm Woodlands	52·0	SN 533 342	C
	Allt Llwyn-Crwn	27·0	SN 533 446	C
1983	Castell Geifr	15·5	SN 420 587	C
1983	Christmas Wood	12·0	SN 774 288	C
1983	Coed Erglodd Fawr	29·0	SN 660 915	C
1983	Coed Erglodd Bach	1·7	SN 654 909	C
1983	Coed Maesygwandde (Cpt 294)	15·0	SN 775 365	C
1983	Forlan and Clover Hill	21·5	SN 080 249	C
1983	Glan yr Annell Isaf (Pt)	5·5	SN 655 360	C
1983	Gorslwyd	7·0	SN 737 763	C
1983	Lletty Twpa	2·9	SN 584 486	C
1983	Pantyrhyn/Neuadd Plantation	13·0	SN 363 562	C
1983	Part Ciliau Farm	20·5	SN 353 560	C
1983	Penyrallt Wood	9·4	SN 368 573	C
1983	Rhyd y Pererinion	2·8	SN 714 766	C
1984	Banc Grip (Cpt 3)	5·2	SN 585 706	C
1984	Cilrhedyn Isaf (Land Adj)	4·5	SN 000 348	C
1984	Ffynon Ddu Wood (Pt)	2·0	SN 120 400	C
1984	Glanmarlais/Cwm Marlais	10·0	SN 685 330	C
1984	Pt Banc Fonllwyd	0·1	SN 562 561	C
1984	Tegfan	2·9	SN 547 578	C
1984	Ty-Gwyn Cpt 32	9·4	SN 528 646	C
1985	Allt Cwmllynfe	3·4	SN 701 337	C
1985	Allt Goch South (Cpt 8)	0·6	SN 238 402	C
1985	Allt Lwyd Plantation	8·9	SN 526 683	C
1985	Bettws Plantation	0·8	SN 593 515	C
1985	Caeo/Brechfa Package Allt Troed y Rhiw	67·0	SN 520 350	C
1985	Causeway Block	34·0	SM 908 224	C
1985	Crynfryn Pt	1·3	SN 583 610	C
1985	Derry Ormond Pt	1·3	SN 590 520	C
1985	Land Adjoining North Lodge	0·1	SN 564 498	C
1985	Old Pale Package Ffoswine Wood	17·0	SN 202 217	C
1985	Old Pale Package Allt Plas y Beili	7·0	SN 157 238	C
1985	Talog Package Corn Gafr and Bwlch Gwynt	35·5	SN 270 232	C
1985	Talog Package Nant y Castell	143·0	SN 450 304	C
1986	Abercych (Pt) Callt Sena and Allt Goch	23·0	SN 235 407	C
1986	Allt Crug Garn	5·3	SN 519 617	C
1986	Colby Woods Craig y Borion Wood, Little	39·5	SN 115 084	C
1986	Colby Woods Craig y Borion Wood and Pendeilo	0·1	SN 155 084	B
1986	Cwm Wyre	60·5	SN 555 698	C
1986	Dolau Aeron Package Fron Dolau, Allt Dolau and Tain Coed	42·6	SN 590 587	C
1986	Noyadd Trefawr	12·0	SN 260 458	C
1986	Noyadd Trefawr Allt y Cadno	4·0	SN 260 458	C
1986	Old Pale Great Pale and Little Pale	47·0	SN 235 150	C
1986	Old Pale Package Upper Newton	11·0	SN 270 115	C

Year	Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
1986	Old Pale Package Dolwilym and Glyntaf	95·5	SN 170 255	C
1986	Old Pale Package Llanmiloe Woods	39·0	SN 253 091	C
1986	Old Pale Package Allt Glog y Fran	9·0	SN 243 153	C
1986	Old Pale Package Trevaughan	8·0	SN 205 150	C
1986	Old Pale Package The Pale Woodlands	119·0	SN 235 150	C
1986	Old Pale Package Windleway	26·0	SN 249 118	C
1986	Sealyham Woods	34·5	SN 960 273	B
1986	Talog Package Cilhir Uchaf and Talfan Uchaf	104·0	SN 325 238	C
1986	Talog Package Castell Mawr	8·0	SN 275 273	C
1986	Talog Package Allt Cilfrydin and Blaen y Cwm	25·0	SN 355 275	C
1986	Talog Package Llangarth Gynnin	8·0	SN 272 218	C
1986	Talog Package Allt Cefn Cloch and Allt Cithin Duon	41·5	SN 308 245	C
1986	Talog Package Nant Cwm Rhys	10·0	SN 336 305	C
1986	Talog Package Penygraig	8·0	SN 278 247	C
1987	Old Pale Package Allt Penlan	19·0	SN 206 194	C
1987	Scolton	9·5	SN 987 217	C
1987	Sychbant Recreation Area	9·0	SN 045 350	C
1987	Talog Package Caeruchedydd	14·0	SN 250 272	C
1987	Talog Package Cywyn Wood	17·0	SN 336 283	C
1987	Talog Package Allt Cilforch	22·0	SN 275 252	C
1987	Pt Allt Penarth	1·0	SN 651 407	B
1988	Allt Cae Gwynfys Wood	8·3	SN 751 343	C
1988	Castell Gorfod	22·9	SN 265 210	C
1988	Castle Hill	52·5	SN 623 745	C
1988	Cwm Darren Wood (Ty Canol)	5·0	SN 597 072	C
1988	Dan yr Allt	6·8	SN 780 350	C
1988	Gwaun Valley Glynwood	13·5	SN 008 345	C
1988	Lodge Park	10·1	SN 663 937	C
1988	Old Pale Package Glandycross	14·0	SN 140 270	C
1988	Panteg, Pencelli and Pontbren	68·4	SN 130 390	B
1988	Plas Estate	141·3	SN 332 142	C
1988	Talog Package Pant y Maen	7·9	SN 272 262	C
1989	Pen-yr-Heol Ddu	10·2	SN 661 150	C
1989	Talog Package Plas Parcau	9·0	SN 258 279	C
1989	Talog Package Plas Parciau	6·0	SN 323 224	C
1989	Talog Package Penrhiwlas	14·0	SN 334 265	C
1989	Talog Package Allt Tyddyn	11·0	SN 257 294	C
1989	Talog Package Cilhir Uchaf	5·0	SN 319 248	C
1989	Coed Glan Leri	7·2	SN 622 075	C
Woodlands sold in Gwent				
1981	Penycwarel	9·0	ST 175 935	C
1982	Black Vein Washery Land	3·7	ST 229 911	C
1982	Llan Pill	9·0	SO 451 007	B
1982	The Knoll West Lane Coe	24·6	ST 424 903	B
1982	Wern Birs	13·0	SO 450 003	B
1983	Cpt 22 Tynffynnon	2·0	ST 253 874	C
1983	Tintern Package Lot 6 Talycoed	77·0	SO 415 163	C
1983	Lot 13 Manson Grove	10·5	SO 496 154	C
1983	Lot 7 Graig Farm Woods	46·0	SO 404 223	C
1983	Lot 7 Dyffryn Wood	9·5	SO 458 087	C
1983	Lot 12 Clappers Wood	4·5	SO 465 185	C
1983	Lot 2 Bourne Wood	9·0	SO 458 088	C
1983	Lot 9 Coed y Pwll	11·5	SO 440 212	C
1983	Lot 4 Graig Wood	10·5	SO 436 080	C
1983	Vineyard Wood and Adj Wood	2·0	ST 442 922	C
1983	Whitfield Wood	2·4	ST 496 962	B
1984	Barbadoes Wood Pt	2·0	SO 527 003	C
1984	Pontypool Park	19·5	SO 261 002	B
1984	Rogiett Brake	3·4	ST 455 887	C
1984	Tallycoed Court Areas A B	0·9	SO 420 149	B
1984	Tallycoed Court WD Area C		SO 420 149	B
1984	Land at Hafod y Daful	20·1	SO 200 047	C
1984	Land at Tormynydd	0·1	SO 474 019	B
1984	Ynys Hywell Farm	48·0	ST 193 909	B
1984	Tintern Package Lot 8 Highmeadow Wood	61·0	SO 412 228	C
1984	Lot 3 Yew Tree Wood	6·0	SO 454 087	C
1984	Lot 11 Colebrook Wood	7·5	SO 463 183	C
1984	Lot 5 Lower Pen y Clawdd	24·0	SO 436 080	C
1985	Tintern Package Lot 10 Tower Hill Wood	13·5	SO 454 193	C
1985	Woods at Lower Machen Pt 603	8·8	ST 238 879	B
1985	Youngs Grove	1·3	SO 532 093	C
1986	Henllys Cpt 32A	1·5	ST 273 910	B
1986	Skirrid Blocks Cpt 311	14·0	SO 327 168	C

Year	Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
1987	Coed Wern Ddu	5·0	ST 289 893	C
1987	Kennels Wood	4·0	ST 489 946	C
1987	Skirrid Blocks Cpt 301	17·0	SO 327 168	C
1987	Wyelands Estate Cpt 152	3·0	ST 520 920	B
1987	Wyelands Estate Cpt 153	2·7	ST 520 920	B
1988	Coed Mawr Gotyre	7·0	SO 314 065	C
1988	Land at Carno	2·0	SO 162 130	C
1988	Graig Wyllt	12·1	ST 244 884	C
1988	Part Ffrwd Wood	2·0	SO 292 117	B
1988	Pwllmawr Wood	8·0	SO 528 103	C
1989	Coed y Trauch, Coed Llyneu	21·1	ST 299 856	C
1989	Lower Machen	7·5	ST 244 883	C
1989	Poolhead Wood	5·0	ST 397 887	B
1989	Trevella Woods	25·7	ST 422 978	C
1989	Goytre Wharf (Exchange)	0·7	SO 311 064	C
Woodlands sold in Gwynedd				
1982	Land Adj Tyddyn Bach	1·4	SH 733 412	C
1982	Land Adj Tyn-Yr-Ardd	0·7	SH 779 602	C
1982	Tyddyn Isaf (Cpt 102)	27·0	SH 480 850	C
1983	Abergwynant	20·5	SH 680 180	C
1983	Goetre Land	5·7	SH 718 244	U
1983	Land Adj Brynprydydd	0·1	SH 741 229	C
1983	Llechwedd Melyn	10·6	SH 617 988	C
1983	Nannau Estate	79·3	SH 735 200	C
1983	Nurse Cae Seren	7·0	SH 900 332	B
1983	Parc Top Y Rhos	19·5	SH 198 308	C
1983	Penrhos Isaf Land	2·8	SH 739 239	U
1983	Pentre Plod	6·0	SH 895 304	C
1983	Ty Canol	28·6	SH 353 445	C
1984	Bangor By-Pass	1·9	SH 580 680	C
1984	Bedw (Cpt 56)	47·7	SH 910 310	C
1984	Coed Cae Fali (Pt Cpt 206)	58·0	SH 640 402	B
1984	Coed Pen Y Cefn	16·1	SH 725 187	C
1984	Cwm Mynach Isaf	180·0	SH 685 215	C
1984	Ffridd-Y-Mynydd (Penmaenpool)	31·5	SH 693 180	C
1984	Gwydyr Conwy Valley Package			
	Coed Pentre Piogod	1·8	SH 765 719	B
	Marle Hall Woods	12·0	SH 800 790	B
	Coed Bryn Goleu	4·7	SH 813 700	C
	Coed Cae Coch	1·0	SH 779 651	C
	Maenen Hall Woods	21·6	SH 793 656	C
	Bwlch y Gwynt	8·5	SH 825 606	C
	Coed Tyn y Nant	4·4	SH 814 685	C
	Bryn Eisteddfod	21·0	SH 830 775	C
	Coed Frongoch	6·5	SH 814 690	C
	Coed Bron Garth	5·4	SH 820 793	B
	Coed y Brain	10·4	SH 819 665	B
	Coed Craflwyn	5·3	SH 764 723	B
	Cefn Llech	2·9	SH 809 665	C
1984	Land Adj Ffridd Bryn Coch	0·8	SH 694 290	C
1984	Taldrwst (Mynachdy)	46·9	SH 300 917	C
1984	Tyddyn Mawr	2·6	SH 707 160	C
1985	Aberglaslyn Wood	28·0	SH 590 463	C
1985	Abergwynant East Cpt F11	18·8	SH 682 176	C
1985	Bryn y Gwin	4·9	SH 717 177	C
1985	Caerhun Cpt 88	1·3	SH 573 687	C
1985	Coed Cefn Llanfair & Coed Wern	21·3	SH 323 336	C
1985	Coed Fron Acre Nant y Rhiw & Coed y Garth	20·9	SH 804 696	C
1985	Parc Mawr	33·9	SH 760 740	C
1985	Coed Pen y Bryn	2·9	SH 812 703	C
1985	Land Adj Esgairwen	0·6	SH 763 203	B
1985	Land Adj Nanthir	2·4	SH 816 110	C
1985	Maes y Neuadd	25·1	SH 620 350	C
1985	Plas Bodafon	21·0	SH 480 850	C
1985	Plas Bodafon	4·0	SH 477 855	C
1985	Pt Wern Wood (Road imp)	0·1	SH 626 418	C
1985	Road Impr at Hafod y Morfa	0·1	SH 705 196	C
1985	Rhiwerfa Cpt 1412	18·1	SH 670 065	C
1985	Trefriw Service Reservoir	0·2	SH 768 634	C
1985	Vale of Ffestiniog (Wernwood)	14·0	SH 626 420	C
1985	Vale of Ffestiniog (Hafod Boeth)	161·0	SH 635 410	C
1985	Vale of Ffestiniog (Coed Hafod Talog)	4·7	SH 625 399	C
1986	Cefn Creuan Cpts 7 and 8	93·7	SH 795 195	C
1986	Land at Tyddon Bach	5·6	SH 730 413	C
1986	Land Adj Creigiau Isaf	0·6	SH 947 391	C

Year	Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
1986	Llwydiarth Exchange	9·0	SH 799 084	C
1986	Llwydiarth Plantation	2·5	SH 792 111	C
1987	Coed y Green	5·7	SH 405 714	C
1987	Dinas Mawddwy Lot 4 Tynypwll	11·6	SH 855 155	C
1987	Dinas Mawddwy Lot 3 Tynyceunant	12·7	SH 893 163	C
1987	Lot 5 Coed Cefn Coch and Coed y Bwlch	46·2	SH 865 143	C
1987	Lot 6 Coed Pant Glas and Bwlch y Garnedd	36·3	SH 879 142	C
1987	Lot 7 Tynywern	10·1	SH 900 142	C
1987	Dolhendre Wood	4·0	SH 855 310	C
1987	Goetre Woodlands	88·2	SH 645 185	C
1987	Gwydyr/Conwy Valley Package (Glyn Parc)	18·3	SH 770 730	C
1987	Land at Aberangell (Mary Pugh Fields)	3·0	SH 835 102	C
1987	Land at Gelligen Fach	0·4	SH 742 023	C
1988	Coed Perddwr, Hafod Gwyfs	52·7	SH 590 450	C
1988	Land Adj Pen Bryn	1·1	SH 556 796	C
1988	Sychnant	14·4	SH 707 391	C
1989	Dinas Mawddwy Lot 2 (Plasau)	58·2	SH 880 178	C
1989	Llwynbedw Isaf	5·3	SH 459 503	C
1989	Madryn Castle Woodlands	70·8	SH 285 367	C
1989	Mynogau	318·8	SH 830 180	C
Woodlands sold in Mid Glamorgan				
1982	Land at Ffynon Dwyn	12·4	ST 053 964	C
1983	Derwen Block	6·4	SS 913 824	C
1984	Coed-y-Bedw	16·0	ST 112 827	B
1985	Coed Pen y Parc	13·0	ST 077 933	C
1985	Ogmore Washery Site	24·1	SS 942 894	C
1987	Land at End of Dunraven	3·7	SS 955 976	C
1988	Coed Llanfedw	6.0	ST 225 862	C
1988	Gelli Feddgaer	19·0	SS 952 865	C
1988	Hensol Package	2·0	ST 061 831	C
1988	Waun y Gilfach	37·0	SS 845 885	C
1989	Moelgilau	36·0	SS 904 885	C
1989	Pentre Tips	27·8	SS 978 960	C
Woodlands sold in South Glamorgan				
1983	Garn Llwyd	13·0	ST 060 715	B
1983	Tair Onen Package—Coed Pen y Breach	10·0	ST 048 780	C
1984	Coed Pen y Fforddfawr	7·0	ST 030 750	C
1984	Tair Onen Package—City Wood	14·4	SS 996 782	C
1984	Tair Onen Package—Oak Park Wood	3·0	ST 036 803	B
1984	Tair Onen Package—Hill Farm Wood	2·0	ST 051 788	B
1984	Tair Onen Package—Coed Breigan	10·0	SS 982 926	B
1985	Tair Onen Package—Coed St Hilary	6·0	ST 011 732	C
1986	Cwrt-yr-Alla Woods	128·0	ST 138 743	C
1986	Tair Onen Package—Coed Horseland	8·0	ST 044 723	C
1986	Tair Onen Package Lot 7 Coed Arthur	26·0	ST 039 715	C
1988	Barry Link Road Ely Section	2·2	ST 153 755	B
1988	Plymouth Wood	52·9	ST 153 755	C
Woodland sold in West Glamorgan				
1983	Cadoxton Wood	41·0	SS 765 995	C
1983	CPTS 3C D E (Baradychwallt)	5·3	SS 790 962	C
1983	Mosshouse Wood	11·0	SS 779 981	C
1983	Nicholaston Wood	27·0	SS 513 881	B
1985	Hafodheulog Wood	19·0	SS 845 847	C
1985	March Hywel (Pt)	61·0	SN 758 029	C
1985	Penrhiw Angharad Uchaf	45·5	SS 804 995	C
1985	Wern Halog Woods	4·0	SS 510 928	B
1986	Hayes Wood	28·0	SS 498 987	C
1986	Land for M4	0·4	SS 791 869	C
1987	Tarreni Gleison Tip	2·0	SN 757 062	C
1988	Derlwyn Opencast Site	123·0	SN 880 080	C
1988	Kilvrough Wood	7·0	SS 555 892	B
1988	Land at Nant-y-Gwddyl	10·0	SN 885 078	B
Woodlands sold in Powys				
1981	Nant y Crach	2·0	SO 145 928	B
1981	Birchybank Coppice	5·7	SO 080 917	B
1981	The Forest	3·1	SO 170 973	B
1982	Alltwnog	20·2	SO 018 943	C
1982	Birchen Coppice	8·5	SO 265 573	C
1982	Cae Heylin	2·2	SO 106 895	C
1982	Cave Wood	7·0	SO 313 593	C
1982	Coed Glan Tanat	0·5	SJ 148 238	C

Year	Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
1982	Coed y Bedw	12·0	SO 050 560	C
1982	Coed y Brain (W) and Lower	9·3	SO 110 982	C
1982	Glyn Isaf Wood	4·3	SJ 134 036	C
1982	Land at Craig Farm	2·0	SN 853 518	C
1982	Lower Cwm y Ddalfa	9·3	SO 014 875	C
1982	Lower Wig	3·0	SO 125 880	C
1982	Newhouse Wood	1·8	SO 145 928	C
1982	Glyn Twymyn	27·2	SH 844 042	C
1982	Perth y Bi	4·1	SO 213 927	C
1982	Pwll-Iwrch and Pen y Banc	10·0	SH 835 011	C
1982	Rook Wood and Tylau Wood	10·5	SO 219 408	B
1982	Ty Mawrwoods	8·0	SO 144 970	C
1982	View Wood	5·2	SO 217 897	C
1982	Wenallt	2·8	SH 945 488	C
1983	Carno Wood	15·0	SN 983 231	C
1983	Coch y Dwst	8·0	SO 055 640	C
1983	Coed y Gwernydd	13·4	SJ 115 150	C
1983	Crynfryn and Cae Star	23·0	SN 975 625	C
1983	Dolagored Cpt 87	20·0	SO 005 550	C
1983	Ffridd Wood	15·3	SO 075 900	C
1983	Gwern Dyfnant	4·0	SO 232 568	C
1983	Cwgia Lake Woods	7·5	SO 054 982	C
1983	Cae Heulen	61·0	SN 790 990	C
1983	Penarth Cpt 108	8·2	SO 115 529	C
1983	Llwyndyrys	4·0	SN 948 843	C
1983	Crybynau Pltn	11·6	SN 943 857	C
1983	Clydffanau	5·4	SN 980 850	C
1983	Coedcwmberyr and Berthllwyd Coppice	117·4	SN 948 843 SN 980 850	C
1983	Rhydolgod	13·0	SN 940 680	C
1983	Talgarth Hospital Woods	8·0	SO 166 327	B
1983	Ty'n-y-Graig Wood	3·7	SO 050 977	C
1984	Allt Fawr	20·5	SJ 140 140	C
1984	Brycheiniog Main Block	634·0	SO 050 390	C
1984	Coed Erw Ddol	6·0	SN 942 543	C
1984	Coed Neuadd	3·7	SN 980 562	C
1984	Coed Ty Canol	4·2	SN 995 522	C
1984	Esgair Gronwen	3·6	SN 876 895	C
1984	Glangwesyn Cpt 30	9·0	SN 865 547	C
1984	Gwarallt Wood	15·0	SO 006 498	C
1984	Bettws Dingle	17·0	SO 226 462	C
1984	Wern Frank Wood	6·0	SO 195 335	C
1984	Wood Near Ty'n-y-Cwm	12·0	SO 113 310	C
1984	Llwyni Dingle	5·0	SO 198 445	C
1984	Tynyrhos Exchange	4·0	SN 875 815	C
1984	Cwmfforest Wood	7·0	SO 184 298	C
1984	Burnt House Wood	1·5	SO 193 446	C
1984	Wood Near Llandefaelog	6·5	SO 118 303	C
1984	Hendre Ladis	29·0	SN 802 108	B
1984	Llanfechan Wood	10·0	SN 978 498	C
1984	Llanwrtyd Package Ffosyrhyddod	65·0	SN 885 505	C
1984	Llanwrtyd Package Sugar Loaf	89·0	SN 840 431	C
1984	Lluast Cpt 170 (PT) (Land Adj Penywaun)	2·7	SJ 023 050	C
1984	Pencae Cpt 24D	6·0	SN 893 555	C
1984	Pentrenant Dingle	9·5	SO 240 905	C
1984	Tylwch	26·1	SN 973 805	C
1984	Banhadlog Woods	6·3	SN 972 807	C
1984	Penybank	7·8	SN 972 807	C
1984	Glascoed	8·2	SN 988 892	C
1984	Penpontbren	13·8	SN 972 807	C
1984	Robins Bank Plantation	3·9	SN 978 890	C
1985	Cefn Caregog	4·8	SJ 152 142	C
1985	Coed Lladron	28·7	SO 121 689	C
1985	Cwm Wood	19·2	SO 055 955	C
1985	Cwm yr Ychen Cpts 10 and 11	112·0	SN 950 760	C
1985	Foel Ortho Cpt 86	54·0	SJ 065 217	C
1985	Wood Near Bronydd	3·0	SO 224 456	C
1985	Land at Red Lion	1·5	SO 066 772	C
1985	Llanwrtyd Package	6·0	SN 892 489	C
1985	Mynydd Mawr North	3·8	SJ 151 217	C
1985	Mynydd Mawr South	3·7	SJ 156 211	C
1985	Mynydd Ty Coch	10·9	SJ 143 210	C
1985	Park Wood	57·0	SO 166 345	C
1985	Rhosgoch Wood North	7·3	SO 024 565	C
1985	Rhosgoch Wood South	6·4	SO 023 558	C
1985	Ty Gwyn Plantation and Neuadd Woods	38·2	SO 020 560	C
1986	Bailey Bevan	5·8	SO 046 650	C

Year	Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
1986	Bryn Hennllys Occs	69·0	SN 763 123	C
1986	Coed Bron-y-Fedw and Penarth	9·4	SJ 089 032	C
1986	Coed Dolgead	4·4	SJ 084 088	C
1986	Hendre-Fach	2·0	SO 003 676	C
1986	Land Adj The Kennels	0·1	SO 166 968	B
1986	Rhiw-Saeson	66·0	SH 900 600	C
1987	Allt Goch	8·0	SN 950 973	C
1987	Cefn yr Parc Woods	8·5	SO 003 283	C
1987	Dyffryn	11·8	SJ 148 133	C
1987	Hay Package Trefeinon Woods	22·0	SO 142 298	C
1987	Hay Package College Wood	4·0	SO 150 320	C
1987	Hay Package Allt Velindre	84·0	SO 195 363	C
1987	Hay Package Forest Wood	36·0	SO 207 432	C
1987	Hay Package (Pt) Penylan Wood	8·5	SO 209 442	C
1987	Nantyrofferiad (Pt)	10·7	SO 031 433	C
1987	Parc Llwydiarth	0·7	SJ 020 154	C
1987	Penlan Plantations	23·8	SO 037 655	C
1987	Pontbrenddu Cpt 4	15·0	SN 948 595	C
1987	Round Wood	3·3	SJ 185 098	C
1987	Stonehouse Wood	8·8	SJ 182 102	C
1988	Charity Wood	3·0	SO 241 210	C
1988	Hay Package Cwm Brychen	13·5	SO 256 323	C
1988	Land Adj Park Llwydiarth	1·0	SJ 023 153	C
1988	Llanwrtyd Package Maesygwaelod	18·8	SN 883 483	C
1988	Penarth Wood	5·6	SO 138 918	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Coed Tyddyn	3·4	SO 039 545	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Forty Acre Wood	3·6	SO 040 556	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Pencerrig East	1·8	SO 043 543	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Erw Bant	2·0	SO 042 562	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Castle Crab Wood	2·8	SO 044 554	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Dugoed Dingle	16·0	SO 035 540	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Tyncoed Woods	23·9	SO 029 551	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Cwrt yr Alla Wood	12·9	SO 085 610	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Pencerrig Wood	7·8	SO 040 537	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Cilgwynfydd	3·5	SO 041 549	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Newmead Farm 1	12·8	SO 055 540	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Coed Mawr	6·8	SO 050 545	C
1988	Plantations Near Llandrin Newmead Farm 2	8·6	SO 055 536	C
1988	Woodland Near Cathedine	24·0	SO 150 259	C

* The species composition is not available in any more detail than B for mainly broadleaves, C for mainly conifers and U for unplanted.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all woodlands currently proposed for sale in Wales by the Forestry Commission and state for each such woodland the *(a)* acreage, *(b)* map reference and *(c)* species composition.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 9 March 1989]* The information is given in the following table:

Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
Woodlands proposed for sale in Clwyd			
Betws Lodge Wood	13·50	SH 928 764	C
Coed Pantglas and Coedynant	26·80	SJ 090 568	C
Coed y Garreg	22·10	SJ 133 782	C
Nant-y-Ffrith and Gwernto	153·00	SH 265 545	C
Plas Efenechtyd	8·30	SH 104 567	C
Woodlands proposed for sale in Dyfed			
Allt Goch	34·30	SN 670 810	C
Allt Ty Cam	4·40	SN 688 802	C
Allt Waun Corngan	11·00	SN 383 184	C
Allt Y Gwreiddyn	35·0	SN 675 804	C
Blaencennen Cpt 562	4·00	SN 699 200	C
Caeo/Brechfa Package	33·00	SN 585 430	C
Caeo/Brechfa Package	107·00	SN 670 490	C
Cenarth Estate	58·00	SN 295 390	C
Coed Aberffrwd	12·30	SN 685 787	C
Coed Cwm Cae	4·00	SN 747 867	C
Coed Cwm Llety	3·70	SN 629 806	C
Coed Gault-y-Gyrnig Cpt 295	8·00	SO 808 418	C
Coed Rhiwarthen	9·00	SN 656 790	C
Coed Tan-yr-Allt	7·50	SN 513 580	C

Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
Coed Troed Rhiwfelin	12·00	SN 667 780	C
Coed y Daren	12·20	SN 680 834	C
Coed y Gwyryn	14·80	SN 635 823	C
Coedmore Estate	56·00	SN 195 438	C
College Wood	12·00	SN 345 168	C
Craig Clogan Part Cpt 281	27·00	SN 726 587	C
Cwm Cynfelin	8·00	SN 607 856	C
Edwinsford Estate	151·00	SN 632 346	C
Faedre Fawr (Pt)	6·50	SN 433 420	C
Ffynnon-Rhys (Glan-Nant)	9·90	SN 468 513	C
Foel Allt Cpt 28 Part	7·80	SN 319 399	C
Glanmarlais/Cwm Marlais	9·00	SN 677 334	C
Glanymor	11·50	SN 590 835	C
Glanyrannell Lot 1 (Alt Isaf)	16·00	SN 654 382	C
Glanyrannell Lot 2	10·00	SN 673 372	C
Glanyrannell Lot 11 (Coed Gwynion, Rosehill and Allt y Fron)	14·30	SN 683 300	C
Glanyrannell Lot 4 (Maestwynog)	17·90	SN 690 372	C
Glanyrannell Lot 5 (Cwmrilath)	7·40	SN 679 335	C
Glanyrannell Lot 6 (Cwmmarlais)	1·00	SN 684 333	B
Glanyrannell Lot 7 (Allt Ysgllbor Yoroth)	8·10	SN 701 332	C
Glanyrannell Lot 8 (Banc y Llan)	7·30	SN 675 715	C
Glanyrannell Lot 9 (Goitre)	28·70	SN 648 293	C
Glynllydan	8·00	SN 682 195	C
Gwaun Valley Pengegin	5·90	SN 008 345	C
Letterston Moor	15·00	SM 940 288	C
Little Treffgarne Wood	46·00	SM 965 234	B
Llandovery Package (Now split into smaller packages)	466·20	SN 770 345	C
Llyn Llech Owen	64·00	SN 570 150	C
Melindwr Hall	10·00	SN 686 818	B
Motygido/Penllwyber	21·80	SN 405 575	C
Musland and Lower Broadmoor	10·00	SM 942 275	C
Nant Cellan Fach	5·00	SN 595 843	C
Old Pale Package Westmeads Farm	29·00	SN 263 093	C
Old Pale Package Colston	10·00	SN 254 102	C
Old Pale Package Gors Fach	9·00	SN 165 293	C
Orchard Covert	0·50	SN 564 992	B
Parc-y-Pwll	22·00	SM 976 266	C
Pentre Euan	28·00	SN 090 380	B
Penwenallt	30·00	SN 206 418	B
Plantations near Tynybedw	31·00	SN 690 713	C
Ridgeway Estate	15·00	SN 068 156	C
Ystrad Wood	12·00	SN 395 189	B
Woodlands proposed for sale in Gwent			
Cefyn Mynog	5·50	SO 321 068	C
Craig and Dorlan Woods	8·00	ST 476 986	C
Craig Plantation	2·00	SO 458 153	B
Fruid Wood, Penallt	2·30	SO 529 085	B
Hayes Goldsmiths Joint WD	44·50	SO 525 150	C
Kinsons Plantation	7·00	SO 525 070	C
Land at Nant Hafod Tudor	1·50	ST 201 916	B
Longditch Wood	10·00	ST 380 876	B
Newport/Worcester T RD	4·00	SO 142 144	B
Park Wood (Pt)	11·50	ST 251 870	C
Risca/Rogerstone By-pass	2·90	ST 216 913	C
Routs Wood and Great Wood	35·40	SO 383 886	B
Upper Seven Acres	5·00	SO 441 897	B
Wilcrick Hill	7·00	SO 412 877	B
Woodlands proposed for sale in Gwynedd			
Cadair Ifan coch	52·40	SH 790 668	C
Coed Gorllwyn and Coed Aber	16·50	SH 589 426	C
Craig y Gelli (Ynysfor)	4·20	SH 591 433	C
Cwm Gwared	42·00	SH 413 483	C
Dinas Mawddwy Lot 7	1·40	SH 872 138	C
Dinas Mawddwy Lot 1	4·70	SH 910 199	C
Hafotty and Garreg Fawr	41·30	SH 627 436	C
Mynydd Rhiw	60·20	SH 240 295	C
Part Dolfriog	1·50	SH 612 457	B
Penmachno-NT Lease Exchange	27·00	SH 770 535	C
Pt Escair-Gawr	2·00	SH 822 231	C
Woodlands proposed for sale in mid Glamorgan			
Coed Brithdir/Ty'r Capel	7·00	SO 138 027	C
Coed Wernlys	6·00	SS 898 828	C
Gelligaer	32·50	SS 768 940	C
Hensol Package	24·00	ST 034 796	B
Hensol Package	6·00	ST 029 831	C

Name	Area (hectares)	Grid Reference	Species*
Land at St. John's Colliery	25·00	SS 883 917	C
Pennsylvania	35·00	SS 885 832	C
Woodlands proposed for sale in Powys			
Allt Newydd	15·00	SN 993 343	C
Berth Ddu	9·00	SN 910 325	C
Cefn Hybol	8·20	SO 160 966	C
Cefn-Derw	10·10	SO 141 805	C
Cefyn Coed	8·00	SN 987 342	C
Coed Beili Glas/Cefn Gof	15·00	SN 910 325	C
Coed Cae Gilbert	5·30	SN 882 970	C
Coed Mawr	7·00	SN 946 306	C
Coed-y-Rhiwlas	19·00	SN 958 315	C
Cwm Lliw	5·50	SN 956 298	C
Cyfronydd	7·70	SJ 145 085	C
Dolgau	290·00	SN 900 935	C
Gamallt	13·60	SN 955 712	C
Gilfach Plantation	8·80	SO 275 662	C
Gwern Dyfnant Woods	11·90	SO 225 565	C
Gwern-f-Figyn	6·50	SN 948 309	C
Gwern-Illa	5·00	SO 220 540	C
Gwern-y-Bwlch Cpts 214-216	32·00	SN 870 040	C
Hay Package	72·50	SO 245 355	C
Llys Coppice & Penllys Ro	16·30	SO 175 218	C
Liower Ceulannau	6·70	SO 120 875	C
Lower Serth Wood	3·60	SN 965 695	C
Part Black Nursery	9·80	SO 210 530	C
Pen-y-Bryn	12·00	SN 957 306	C
Pen-y-Castle Wood (Middle)	10·40	SO 135 876	C
Pool & Kerry Hil Plantation	12·90	SO 135 855	C
Scrubby Wood	8·60	SO 210 540	C
Spite Inn	36·60	SN 860 405	C
St. Harmon	1·40	SN 957 700	C
Cefn Fannog	390·00	SN 820 510	C
Gamrhiw/Garth Bank/Cwmcly	424·00	SN 947 507	C
Woodlands proposed for sale in south Glamorgan			
Hensol Package	6·00	ST 057 785	C
Hensol Package	14·00	ST 037 785	C
Hensol Package	14·00	ST 033 783	B
Hensol Package	12·80	ST 160 835	B
Hensol Package	5·00	ST 041 774	B
Hensol Package	6·00	ST 041 791	C
Hensol Package	4·00	ST 055 783	C
Woodlands proposed for sale in west Glamorgan			
Brithdir Wood	12·00	SS 719 981	C
Briton Ferry Woods	16·30	SS 750 930	C
Caerau Park	162·00	SS 855 955	C
Craig Ynysgollen	10·00	SN 802 013	C
Craigfawr	52·00	SS 795 868	C
Gnoll Woods	26·00	SS 768 985	C
Hensol Package	4·00	ST 058 779	C
Melin Llan Road Improvement	0·20	SS 625 993	C
Pt. Penllergaer Wood	20·20	SN 621 002	C
Wern Halog Woods	16·30	SS 510 928	C

* The species composition is not available in any more detail than B for mainly broadleaves and C for mainly conifers.

HEALTH

Schizophrenia

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* the number of patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia eligible for after-care under section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983 and discharged after detention under *(a)* section 3, *(b)* section 37 and *(c)* sections 47 and 48 of the Act.

Mr. Freeman: Central statistics for 1986, the most recent year for which figures are held, show the following numbers of discharges with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia from National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units in England immediately subsequent to a period of formal detention under these sections of the Mental Health Act 1983: *(a)* section 3, 933; *(b)* section 37, 236; *(c)* section 47 and 48, 6. The numbers do not relate to individuals as the same patients may be discharged and readmitted more than once during the year.

All patients discharged following detention under these sections are eligible for after-care under section 117 of the Act.

Abortions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year from April 1986 to the latest available date the total number of abortions performed under ground five of the Abortion Act 1967 in the Trent regional health authority; and what percentage this represents by year of all abortions performed.

Mr. Freeman: I regret that the information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost. I will write to the hon. Member with the figures for the most recent year available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of abortions performed by year in the Trent regional health authority from April 1968 to the latest available date.

Mr. Freeman: The information is shown in the table for residents of England and Wales.

Number of terminations performed under the Abortion Act 1967 in Trent regional health authority[1] to usual residents of England and Wales, 27 April 1968 to 30 June 1988.

Year	Number
1968[1 3]	715
1969[1]	2,035
1970[1]	3,254
1971[1]	4,240
1972[1]	5,047
1973[1]	9,116
1974	5,722
1975	5,081
1976	5,175
1977	5,529
1978	5,974
1979	6,626
1980	6,777
1981	6,863
1982	7,463
1983	8,847
1984	9,330
1985	9,099
1986	9,942
1987	10,392
1988[4]	5,420
Total[2]	132,647

[1] Sheffield hospital region 1968-73.
[2] Total from 27 April 1968 to 30 June 1988
[3] Figure is from 27 April to 31 December only
[4] Provisional figure for 1 January to 30 June.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the gross domestic product was spent on the National Health Service in each year since 1959.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows the percentage of GDP spent on the National Health Service for the years 1959 to 1988. The expenditure figures for 1959 to 1964 have been taken from the report of the Royal Commission on the National Health Service. Figures from 1965 have been derived from the United Kingdom national accounts prepared by the Central Statistical Office.

Gross expenditure on the NHS as a percentage of GDP

Year	Per cent.
1959	3·3
1960	3·3
1961	3·4
1962	3·4
1963	3·4
1964	3·4
1965	3·3
1966	3·4
1967	3·6
1968	3·6
1969	3·6
1970	3·8
1971	3·9
1972	4·0
1973	3·9
1974	4·8
1975	5·1
1976	5·1
1977	4·9
1978	4·9
1979	4·8
1980	5·3
1981	5·5
1982	5·3
1983	5·5
1984	5·4
1985	5·3
1986	5·3
1987	5·3
1988	5·2

General Practitioner Services

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per patient per annum for general practitioner services.

Mr. Freeman: In 1987-88, the latest year for which full information is available, the total cost of the general medical services in England represented an average cost per patient per annum of about £26·50. Including the cost of drugs and appliances prescribed by general medical practitioners, the average cost rises to about £59. These figures exclude any element for the costs of hospital referrals initiated by general medical practitioner, or for the administrative costs of family practitioner committees which manage these and other family practitioner services.

Benzodiazepines

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the percentage of those currently taking benzodiazepines in the United Kingdom who are addicted to the drug.

Mr. Freeman: We do not hold this information centrally.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a compensation system for people whose lives have been damaged by benzodiazepine addiction.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans to do so.

Bolvidon

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were dispensed for the drug Bolvidon by community pharmacists in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: Bolvidon is a branded form of Mianserin hydrochloride. In England in 1987 community pharmacists dispensed 150,200 prescriptions written for Bolvidon. In the same period, community pharmacists dispensed a further 412,100 prescriptions written for Mianserin, in a proportion of which cases they will have supplied Bolvidon.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital patients were infected with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus in the last year for which figures are available; how many died; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: In the year to 31 December 1988, 625 hospital patients were infected with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) with 24 deaths attributable or partly attributable to the infection. High standards of hygiene for both patients and staff, and the thorough cleaning of infected wards, are important for the control of MRSA. A national survey of MRSA is in continual progress conducted jointly by the hospital infection division of the public health laboratory service and the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre with results being available to microbiologists on request.

Neurosciences Centres (South East Thames Region)

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce a decision on the future siting of a neurosciences centre in the South East Thames region.

Mr. Mellor: I have today approved the proposal by South East Thames regional health authority to build a new neurosciences centre on Denmark hill, costing more than £27 million. It will bring together the two existing neurosciences units at the Brook hospital, Greenwich and at the Maudsley hospital, thus husbanding highly specialised professional expertise in order to improve the standard of treatment to patients. The centre will be on the Maudsley hospital site, but linked by a bridge to King's College hospital. The future siting of a neurosciences centre has been the subject of many years of study, with resulting uncertainty for the existing units at the Brook and the Maudsley. This decision will bring those years of uncertainty to an end. The health authorities want to improve the services now provided at the Brook hospital and I have asked the region to come back to me at the end of this year with their proposals for a range of hospital provision in the Greenwich district which will meet the needs of local people.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when sections 2, 3, 7, 8(ii) and 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 are likely to be implemented.

Mr. Scott: We plan to implement section 11 later this year. We have accepted the local authority associations' view that the next priority should be section 7, and detailed work on this is well under way. It will be followed by work on the remaining sections of the Act.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account will be taken of the need of some people with disabilities for more space or extra rooms in deciding notional market rents for the purpose of housing benefit claims; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government do not believe that the Exchequer should in general subsidise spare accommodation through the housing benefit scheme but we accept that some housing benefit claimants, such as the disabled, may need a spare room.

Under the arrangements from 1 April 1989 for assessment of reasonable market rents, rent officers will indicate whether or not housing benefit claimants are living in accommodation with an excessive number of rooms and, if so, will assess a notional rent for accommodation of an appropriate size. They will take account of the number of people in the household, including any carer living with a disabled person.

The decision whether to restrict the rent eligible for housing benefit is one for the local authority but, after 13 weeks, it will generally receive subsidy on benefit only up to the level of the rent officer's assessment. However, in the case of a disabled person, the local authority may restrict the eligible rent only if it is satisfied that suitable cheaper alternative accommodation is available and it is reasonable to expect the claimant to move. If the authority cannot restrict the rent, it will receive full, 97 per cent., subsidy up to the level of the rent officer's assessment and 50 per cent. sbsidy on benefit paid above that level. Benefit expenditure not met by direct subsidy is reflected in the rates support grant arrangements.

Industrial Injuries and Diseases

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the lung diseases which are currently recognised as industrial diseases for the purposes of workers' compensation legislation.

Mr. Scott: The lung diseases prescribed for defined occupations under the Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) Regulations are:—

Extrinsic allergic alveolitis (including farmer's lung)
Poisoning by oxides of nitrogen
Poisoning by beryllium or a compound of beryllium
Poisoning by cadmium
Primary carcinoma of a bronchus or of a lung
Pneumoconiosis
Byssinosis
Diffuse mesothelioma (primary neoplasm of the mesothelium of the pleura or of the pericardium or of the peritoneum)
Occupational asthma (due to exposure to specified agents)
Primary carcinoma of the lung where there is accompanying evidence of one or both of the following *(a)* asbestosis; *(b)* bilateral diffuse pleural thickening
Bilateral diffuse pleural thickening
Lung cancer

Community Care (Grants and Loans)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will indicate the number of cases in the year end 31 March for the Walthamstow, Leytonstone and Woodrange park offices of his Department in which applications for *(a)* community care grants and *(b)* community care loans were turned down.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Such information is available in the Library for the period April 1988 to February 1989. Information for March 1989 will be placed in the Library later this month.

Central Pensions Office

Mr. Peter Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average waiting time for a

telephone call to the central pensions office in Newcastle after it has been received at the switchboard before it is answered by the appropriate office;

(2) what plans there are to improve the speed of response to telephone calls by the appropriate departments at the central pensions office at Newcastle after they have been received at the switchboard.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The average time when the required extension is free is 10 seconds. Information is not collected showing how long it takes to connect to an extension when it is engaged.

A new telephone exchange and additional lines are to be installed at Newcastle central office later this year which will help to improve response times particularly through automatic re-routing of calls.

Grants and Loans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what are the staff to claimant ratios for social fund departments *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the Northern region, *(c)* in South Tyneside, *(d)* in Gateshead, *(e)* in Newcastle, *(f)* in Sunderland and *(g)* in North Tyneside, respectively.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not available in the format requested. Details are recorded monthly of the staff days spent on social fund activity. Information to 28 February 1989, the latest available date, is given in the table.

February 1989

	Staff days spent on Social Fund	*Income Support Load*
National	67,300	4,395,046
North Eastern Region	12,442	708,675
North Tyneside		
Gateshead	276	21,072
Newcastle St. James	206	14,926
Newcastle East	285	14,514
Newcastle West	179	10,451
Wallsend	173	7,986
South Tyneside		
Houghton le Spring	75	4,363
Jarrow	172	7,515
North Shields	160	10,438
South Shields	285	12,006
Sunderland North	374	18,823
Sunderland South	238	15,389

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications were received in each month since 1 April 1988 for (i) community care grants, (ii) budgeting loans and (iii) crisis loans *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the Northern region, *(c)* in South Tyneside, *(d)* in Gateshead, *(e)* in Newcastle, *(f)* in Sunderland and *(g)* in North Tyneside, respectively.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Details of the Department's local offices both nationally and in the north-eastern region are given in this information held in the Library. Details of the offices in the North Tyneside and South Tyneside areas were given in my reply to the hon. Member on 23 March at column *787*.

Changes to the social fund on 11 April 1988 introduced community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans. Information on the numbers of applications processed for social fund loans and grants, listed by local office, is in the Library.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken by social fund officers to reach a decision on crisis or budgeting loans or community care grants *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the Northern region, *(c)* in South Tyneside, *(d)* in Gateshead, *(e)* in Newcastle, *(f)* in Sunderland and *(g)* in North Tyneside, respectively, for each month from April 1988.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The average for budgeting loans clearance times includes the time taken by the applicant to accept or refuse the loan offer. This time may vary from as little as a few minutes up to 14 calendar days.

The information available is shown in the table:

Average clearance time (in whole working days)

	Crisis loans	*Budgeting loans*	*Community care grants*
April 1988			
National	0·5	17·1	8·7
North Eastern Region	1·0	17·1	9·0
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	24·0	11·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	7·0	9·0
Newcastle East	1·0	16·0	1·0
Newcastle West	1·0	16·0	14·0
Wallsend	1·0	24·0	5·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	6·0	27·0	1·0
Jarrow	3·0	14·0	5·0
North Shields	1·0	8·0	1·0
South Shields	3·0	40·0	13·0
Sunderland North	2·0	22·0	21·0
Sunderland South	2·0	19·0	1·0
May 1988			
National	0·5	11·5	4·5
North Eastern Region	0·9	11·6	4·1
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	20·0	3·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	12·0	1·0
Newcastle East	1·0	12·0	1·0
Newcastle West	1·0	4·0	2·0
Wallsend	1·0	23·0	2·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	3·0	4·0	1·0
Jarrow	2·0	6·0	1·0
North Shields	1·0	25·0	1·0
South Shields	6·0	30·0	18·0
Sunderland North	2·0	19·0	6·0
Sunderland South	1·0	16·0	1·0
June 1988			
National	0·6	11·2	4·3
North Eastern Region	0·8	11·2	4·3
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	2·0	11·0	1·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	8·0	7·0
Newcastle East	1·0	9·0	2·0
Newcastle West	1·0	4·0	3·0
Wallsend	1·0	6·0	3·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	3·0	1·0
Jarrow	1·0	5·0	1·0
North Shields	1·0	17·0	1·0
South Shields	7·0	15·0	6·0
Sunderland North	1·0	19·0	15·0
Sunderland South	1·0	26·0	5·0

	Crisis loans	Budgeting loans	Community care grants
July 1988			
National	1·0	13·9	9·7
North Eastern Region	1·1	12·5	8·7
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	2·0	6·0	1·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	6·0	4·0
Newcastle East	1·0	5·0	7·0
Newcastle West	2·0	7·0	4·0
Wallsend	1·0	6·0	5·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	6·0	1·0
Jarrow	1·0	23·0	20·0
North Shields	1·0	22·0	2·0
South Shields	5·0	19·0	11·0
Sunderland North	1·0	14·0	20·0
Sunderland South	1·0	26·0	9·0
August 1988			
National	1·0	12·8	9·1
North Eastern Region	1·1	12·1	8·5
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	14·0	2·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	8·0	5·0
Newcastle East	3·0	4·0	1·0
Newcastle West	1·0	5·0	3·0
Wallsend	1·0	9·0	10·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	8·0	5·0
Jarrow	1·0	17·0	16·0
North Shields	1·0	20·0	3·0
South Shields	4·0	30·0	19·0
Sunderland North	2·0	7·0	7·0
Sunderland South	2·0	9·0	11·0
September 1988			
National	1·2	16·3	10·1
North Eastern Region	1·3	16·0	9·8
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	11·0	3·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	12·0	7·0
Newcastle East	2·0	11·0	3·0
Newcastle West	1·0	16·0	5·0
Wallsend	2·0	13·0	6·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	9·0	4·0
Jarrow	1·0	9·0	5·0
North Shields	1·0	27·0	8·0
South Shields	7·0	14·0	12·0
Sunderland North	1·0	18·0	13·0
Sunderland South	2·0	15·0	13·0
October 1988			
National	1·3	13·8	9·0
North Eastern Region	1·3	12·5	8·1
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	10·0	5·0
Newcastle St. James	1·0	8·0	2·0
Newcastle East	1·0	10·0	4·0
Newcastle West	1·0	17·0	5·0
Wallsend	2·0	12·0	5·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	10·0	4·0
Jarrow	1·0	11·0	4·0
North Shields	1·0	25·0	8·0
South Shields	6·0	19·0	17·0
Sunderland North	1·0	17·0	11·0
Sunderland South	2·0	13·0	13·0
November 1988			
National	1·4	13·3	8·7
North Eastern Region	1·4	12·3	7·7
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	8·0	4·0
Newcastle St. James	3·0	9·0	2·0
Newcastle East	1·0	10·0	6·0
Newcastle West	1·0	5·0	3·0
Wallsend	2·0	13·0	4·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	8·0	4·0
Jarrow	1·0	14·0	12·0
North Shields	1·0	11·0	2·0
South Sheilds	5·0	17·0	11·0
Sunderland North	2·0	16·0	12·0
Sunderland South	2·0	17·0	16·0
December 1988			
National	1·4	8·6	7·1
North Eastern Region	1·4	7·5	5·8
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	7·0	2·0
Newcastle St. James	3·0	5·0	5·0
Newcastle East	1·0	4·0	7·0
Newcastle West	1·0	5·0	2·0
Wallsend	1·0	4·0	4·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	3·0	1·0
Jarrow	1·0	10·0	8·0
North Shields	1·0	14·0	4·0
South Shields	5·0	8·0	6·0
Sunderland North	1·0	9·0	6·0
Sunderland South	2·0	14·0	11·0
January 1989			
National	1·0	10·6	6·5
North Eastern Region	1·1	9·9	6·0
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	10·0	4·0
Newcastle St. James	2·0	9·0	4·0
Newcastle East	1·0	7·0	6·0
Newcastle West	1·0	5·0	2·0
Wallsend	1·0	7·0	6·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	2·0	9·0	7·0
Jarrow	1·0	8·0	5·0
North Shields	2·0	21·0	2·0
South Shields	3·0	14·0	13·0
Sunderland North	1·0	9·0	6·0
Sunderland South	2·0	17·0	11·0
February 1989			
National	1·0	9·3	6·2
North Eastern Region	1·1	8·9	5·6
North Tyneside			
Gateshead	1·0	9·0	3·0
Newcastle St. James	3·0	6·0	5·0
Newcastle East	1·0	8·0	14·0
Newcastle West	1·0	9·0	3·0
Wallsend	1·0	9·0	6·0
South Tyneside			
Houghton le Spring	1·0	10·0	5·0
Jarrow	1·0	15·0	11·0
North Shields	2·0	23·0	1·0
South Shields	3·0	11·0	6·0
Sunderland North	1·0	9·0	7·0
Sunderland South	1·0	14·0	9·0

All figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish a breakdown of the money spent from the latest social fund figures for community care grants, in percentage terms;

(2) what are the latest social fund figures for the community care grants with regard to *(a)* the allocated budget, *(b)* the amount spent from the budget and *(c)* the proportion of successful claims in percentage terms.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Total expenditure on community care grants to the end of February 1989, was £34·1 million, and represented 56·8 per cent. of the budget, arising from 127,121 successful awards. Expenditure in February was over £6 million, representing 110 per cent. of anticipated monthly expenditure.

Approximately 50 per cent. of all applications received to the end of February were successful. The average success rate has gradually improved from the early months of the scheme and in February was 56 per cent. The largest identifiable reason for refusal is that the applicant is not in receipt of income support.

Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table, based on the 1979 and most recently available family expenditure surveys, showing the average weekly net incomes, that is, gross income including non-means-tested state benefits less income tax and national insurance contribution, of each of the following family types *(a)* one adult, non-retired, *(b)* one man, one woman, non-retired, single wage, *(c)* one man, one woman, non-retired, two-wage, *(d)* lone parents, *(e)* one man, one woman, one child, single-wage, *(f)* one man, one woman, one child, two-wage, *(g)* one man, one woman, two children, single-wage and *(h)* one man, one woman, two children, two-wage.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The figures requested are as follows:

Average net income

£ per week

	1979	*1986*
(a) One adult, non-retired	48	89
(b) One man, one woman, non-retired, single wage	84	176
(c) One man, one woman, non-retired, two wages	121	251
(d) Lone parents	53	106
(e) One man, one woman, one child, single wage	94	175
(f) One man, one woman, one child, two wages	113	248
(g) One man, one woman, two children, single wage	100	197
(h) One man, one woman, two children, two wages	121	255

Notes:

1. Net income is defined as gross income from all sources less income tax and national insurance.
2. "Wage" has been defined as any earnings from employment and self-employment.
3. Categories *(a)* and *(d)* differ from the other categories in that they include all people in these family types; both earners and non-earners.
4. Figures are given in cash terms rounded to the nearest pound.
5. Figures are derived from the FES which is a sample survey and are subject to sampling error.

Statutory Sick Pay

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give an estimate of the average number of people receiving statutory sick pay at any one date in the year, for each financial year from the introduction of the scheme in 1983-84 to the most recently available year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information to enable such an estimate to be made is not collected. However, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on 23 March at columns *790-91*, which gives the recorded payments of statutory sick pay in each year since its introduction. The average length of a statutory sick pay spell is about three weeks.

International Peto Foundation

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals exist to provide finance for an international Peto foundation in Hungary for the purposes of rehabilitation of the brain-injured; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir McNair-Wilson) on 17 March at column *394*.

National Insurance

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing his estimates of the number of male and female employees expected to pay national insurance contributions *(a)* in a full year under the April 1989 regime, and *(b)* in a full year under the proposed October 1989 regime, together with the forecast number of employees and the amount of their contributions at each rate; and if he will divide the figures between those contracted-in and those contracted-out.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The information is as follows:

Average number of Class 1 contributors for the full year 1989-90 under both April 1989 and October 1989 regimes (millions)

Rate per cent.	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
STANDARD RATE			
Contracted-in			
5	0·3	1·4	1·7
7	0·5	1·3	1·8
9	3·8	1·7	5·5
Total	4·6	4·4	9·0
Contracted-out			
5	—	0·1	0·1
7	0·1	0·2	0·3
9	6·8	2·8	9·6
Total	6·9	3·1	10·0
Total standard rate	11·5	7·5	19·0
REDUCED RATE (MARRIED WOMEN)			
Contracted-in			
3·85	—	0·5	0·5
Contracted-out			
3·85	—	0·3	0·3
Total reduced rate	—	0·8	0·8

Rate per cent.	Male	Female	Total
Total Class 1 contributors	11·5	8·3	19·8

Estimated Full-year yield under the April 1989 regime (£ billions)

Rate per cent.	Male	Female	Total
STANDARD RATE			
Contracted-in			
5	—	0·2	0·2
7	0·2	0·4	0·6
9	3·9	1·3	5·2
Total	4·1	1·9	6·0
Contracted-out			
5	—	—	—
7	—	0·1	0·1
9	6·5	2·2	8·7
Total	6·5	2·3	8·8
Total standard rate	10·6	4·2	14·8
REDUCED RATE (MARRIED WOMEN)			
Contracted-in			
3·85	—	0·1	0·1
Contracted-out			
3·85	—	0·1	0·1
Total reduced rate	—	0·2	0·2
Total Class 1 contributions	10·6	4·4	15·0

Contracted-out yields are net of the 2 per cent. incentive payments which are payable under the 1986 Social Security Act.

Estimated Full-year yield under the October 1989 regime (£ billions)

	Male	Female	Total
STANDARD RATE[1]			
Contracted-in	3·4	1·5	4·9
Contracted-out[2]	5·5	1·9	7·4
Total standard rate	8·9	3·4	12·3
REDUCED RATE			
Contracted-in	—	0·1	0·1
Contracted-out	—	0·1	0·1
Total reduced rate	—	0·2	0·2
Total Class 1 contributors	8·9	3·6	12·5

[1] All Class 1 contributors paying NIC at the standard rate will pay 2 per cent. of the lower earnings limit and 9 per cent. of earnings in excess of the lower earnings limit (or 7 per cent. if contracted-out) up to the upper earnings limit.

[2] Contracted-out yields are net of the 2 per cent. incentive payments which are payable under the 1986 Social Security Act.

DEFENCE

Navy Retention Rates

8. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve retention rates in the Royal Navy.

37. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve retention rates in the Royal Navy.

47. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve retention rates in the Royal Navy.

50. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to improve retention rates in the Royal Navy.

Mr. Neubert: Present emphasis is on alleviating the effects of time spent at sea. We introduced last October a long service at sea bonus—now to become a monthly allowance—and are giving the seagoer financial help so that he can get home more often. Maximum notice of impending seagoing appointments and drafts is given, to help domestic and personal planning, and we prescribe minimum periods ashore between sea drafts.

More generally, a tri-service review was recently conducted aimed at making allowances more relevant to current and prospective needs. The effect, over a period, should be beneficial to retention.

Gulf Operations

17. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels are currently deployed in the Gulf; and what impact this has on their availability for other duties.

46. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels are currently deployed in the Gulf; and what impact this has on their availability for other duties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Eccles (Miss Lestor) and for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett).

Nuclear Submarines

18. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of emergency planning units in relation to the operation of the British nuclear submarine fleet and Royal Navy procedures for dealing with a nuclear submarine accident in a near port.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The response to a serious accident involving the reactor of a Royal Navy submarine in or near port would be a joint one, including local authority emergency planning units, the Ministry of Defence nuclear accident response organisation, the civil emergency services, and other government departments. The procedures for dealing with accidents are discussed in local liaison committees by the various authorities involved, and are embodied in public and special safety schemes.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear-powered submarines are currently held by Warsaw Pact and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries; at what rate these stocks are being increased; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 210 nuclear-powered submarines in service with the Warsaw Pact and 165 with NATO. Since 1980, NATO and Warsaw Pact production rates for nuclear-powered submarines have been broadly similar, averaging five to six vessels per year.

Conventional Forces

19. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for United Kingdom forces levels in western Europe of progress being made at the conventional force limitation negotiations in Vienna.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe opened in Vienna on 6 March. It is therefore too early to say what will be the implications for our armed forces of any reductions which may be agreed.

42. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on conventional defences since 1978-79.

55. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on conventional forces since 1978-79.

Mr. Younger: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given today to my hon. Friend the Member for Boswell (Mr. Tredinnick).

Mr. Carttiss: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he now intends responding to Mr. Gorbachev's announcement of a unilateral cut in conventional forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We welcome the announced reductions, responding to NATO's long-standing concerns. If implemented, they will be a major step towards removing conventional imbalances in Europe. However, significant imbalances will still remain, and we shall need to maintain our capability to deter aggression while pursuing our goal of conventional stability.

Exercise North Star

20. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons have been learnt as a result of the recent North Star exercise.

58. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons have been learnt as a result of the recent North Star exercise.

62. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons have been learnt as a result of the recent North Star exercise.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Exercise North Star 89, a United States national maritime exercise with multinational participation, including the United Kingdom, took place from 6 to 15 March 1989. Detailed assessment and evaluation of the exercise is currently being undertaken by the United States authorities and the NATO countries which participated. From a United Kingdom viewpoint, early indications are that the exercise was a success.

Soviet Union (Nuclear Submarines)

21. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made concerning Soviet submarine nuclear fleet modernisation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet Union continues to modernise its nuclear submarine fleet. Five Typhoon and five Delta IV nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) have been completed and further units are expected. Typhoon, the world's largest SSBN, is armed with 20 8,000 km range, SS-N-20 submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBNs). The Delta IV is equipped with 16 SS-N-23 SLBNs. Five units of the Oscar class of cruise missile firing submarine (SSGN) have been completed so far, each equipped with 24 SS-N-19 anti-ship cruise missiles with a range of 550 km. More advanced and quieter nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) are being produced, such as the Akula and Sierra classes. The Akula will probably carry the SS-N-21, 2,500 km range, sea-launched cruise missile.

33. **Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made concerning Soviet short-range nuclear forces modernisation.

61. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made concerning Soviet short-range nuclear forces modernisation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet Union has modernised some 95 per cent. of its SNF systems in the course of the last five years and it has begun the process of transferring these new systems to its Warsaw Pact allies. The extent of this modernisation and the large number of weapons which the Soviet Union has available in this category enable it to fill any gaps in its capabilities which will be created by the elimination of missile systems under the INF Treaty. In Europe at present the Warsaw Pact has some 1,450 SNF missile launchers and some 7,000 artillery systems which are capable of firing nuclear as well as conventional and chemical munitions, compared with 88 NATO SNF launchers and some 2,500 NATO artillery systems which are assigned to the nuclear role.

Defence Policy (Representations)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Scotland on defence policy since 11 March; and if he will make a statement.

22. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Scotland on defence policy since 11 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Younger: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter).

RAF Bruggen

23. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit Royal Air Force Bruggen.

44. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit Royal Air Force Bruggen.

60. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit RAF Bruggen.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave today to the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley).

Royal Navy (Expenditure)

24. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on the Royal Navy since 1978-78.

32. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on the Royal Navy since 1978-79.

Mr. Younger: Up to the end of 1987-88, £4·5 billion more had been spent on the Royal Navy, in real terms, than would have been spent if spending had remained at the 1978-79 level. This takes into account GDP inflation and excludes expenditure on both the Falklands garrison and nuclear strategic forces.

British Army of the Rhine

25. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the British Army of the Rhine.

35. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the British Army of the Rhine.

38. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the British Army of the Rhine.

51. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to visit the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has plans to visit BAOR in the autumn; part of this visit will be in the company of his German colleague, Dr. Scholz.

Army (Expenditure)

26. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on the Army since 1978-79.

48. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on the Army since 1978-79.

Mr. Younger: Up to the end of 1987-88, £5 billion more had been spent on the Army, in real terms, than would have been spent if spending had remained at the 1978-79 level. This takes into account GDP inflation and excludes expenditure on the Falklands garrison.

European Fighter Aircraft

27. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his West German counterpart to discuss progress on the European fighter aircraft project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member on 7 February at column *657*.

29. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has had with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation European fighter aircraft management agency in the last three months.

59. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation he has had with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation European fighter aircraft management agency in the last three months.

Mr. Sainsbury: MOD officials have frequent meetings with representatives from NEFMA to discuss all aspects of the European fighter aircraft development programme.

Defence Export Services Organisation

28. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the work of the Defence Export Services Organisation.

40. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received on the work of the Defence Export Services Organisation.

Mr. Sainsbury: A considerable number of letters and representations are received from hon. Members and members of the public covering many different viewpoints including, of course, appreciation of the good work of the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) in helping to secure significant defence exports.

Non-provocative Defence

30. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends adopting a strategy of non-provocative defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO's military strategy, to which the United Kingdom is committed, is entirely defensive.

Sea Harriers

31. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects work to commence on the conversion of the Royal Navy's fleet of Sea Harrier FRS 1 air defence fighters to FRS 2 standard.

Mr. Sainsbury: Work to update the Sea Harrier began in 1983 at British Aerospace for the aircraft conversion and Ferranti for the Blue Vixen radar. The first FRS 1 aircraft will be delivered to British Aerospace for conversion to FRS 2 standard in 1990.

Defence Efforts (Western Europe)

34. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his west European counterparts on the need to improve upon existing levels of defence efforts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has regular bilateral and multilateral discussions with his western European colleagues on NATO's defence plans and the contributions made by each ally. For example, the equitable sharing of roles, risks and responsibilities within the Alliance was dicussed at the meetings of the Eurogroup and defence planning committee between 30 November and 2 December 1988.

British Forces (NATO)

36. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of British forces are under North Atlantic Treaty Organisation command.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Most British forces are committed to NATO, but in peacetime they normally operate under national command. However, some RAF squadrons are under NATO command in peacetime and details of these are given in annex C of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988" (Cm. 344-I).

AOR Programme

39. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the auxiliary oiler replenishment programme.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 10 January at column *675*.

Belgian Defence Minister

41. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the Belgian Defence Minister; and what matters will be discussed.

53. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the Belgian Defence Minister; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave the hon. Members for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) earlier today.

Free Fall Nuclear Bomb

43. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on a replacement for the free fall nuclear bomb.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For credible deterrence, nuclear weapons must be kept effective and up to date. The United Kingdom's free-fall bombs are no exception, and we are continuing to study a number of options for their replacement around the turn of the century.

Nuclear Test Veterans

45. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects a decision to be reached regarding the claim for compensation from the nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 7 February at column *672*.

Westland plc

49. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the chairman of Westland plc; and what was discussed.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend's last meeting with Sir Leslie Fletcher at the Ministry of Defence was on 22 February this year. Their discussions at this meeting are treated as confidential, as are all private discussions between the Secretary of State and senior representatives of our contractors.

RAF (Expenditure)

52. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much more in real terms his Department has spent on the Royal Air Force since 1978-79.

Mr. Younger: Up to the end of 1987-88, £9 billion more had been spent on the Royal Air Force, in real terms, than would have been spent if spending had remained at the 1978-79 level. This takes into account GDP inflation and excludes expenditure on the Falklands garrison.

Defence Expenditure

54. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he intends to bring the United Kingdom defence expenditure in line with the NATO average.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Both in money terms and as a percentage of GDP, United Kingdom defence expenditure is substantially above the NATO median. The United Kingdom defence budget is planned to rise over the period to 1991-92; taking into account the latest reported budgetary plans of other members of the Alliance, the United Kingdom is likely to remain among the highest-spending nations.

US Defence Secretary

56. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to meet his new United States counterpart; and what issues he plans to discuss with him.

Mr. Younger: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) today.

Fishing Boats

57. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning incidents involving fishing boats and submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Letters continue to be received from fishermen's organisations and from other interested groups and individuals about a number of incidents in which submarines are alleged to have been involved.

Nuclear-free Zones

63. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what weight he gives to declarations of local authorities that their areas are to be regarded as nuclear-free zones in deciding on disposition of naval vessels.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The disposition of naval vessels is a matter which affects national security, and as such it must remain the responsibility of central rather than local Government. A defence policy can be effective only if applied on a national basis.

Arms Control

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government on seeking arms control agreements in those areas where NATO has a technological lead over the Warsaw Pact.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The principal cause of instability in Europe is the imbalance between the conventional forces of NATO and the much larger conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact. Relative advantages in particular technologies are difficult to assess, subject to change, and

do not themselves necessarily compensate for such numerical imbalances. NATO's objective is to eliminate imbalances in the most threatening systems in Europe, thus enhancing security at a lower level of forces.

Amazonia (Forest Fires)

Mr. Tam Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet the Minister of Defence of Brazil, General Leonidas, to discuss the feasibility of British military aircraft and their pilots being loaned to Brazil for participation in forest fire fighting in Amazonia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has no plans to seek a meeting with General Leonidas, who met Ministers for talks at the Ministry of Defence in the course of his visit to the United Kingdom in November 1987. The British armed forces have no aircraft suitable for fighting forest fires.

Royal Arsenal, Woolwich

Mr. John Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the sums spent on maintenance, repairs and improvements to his Department's land and buildings at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, during each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Neubert: The sums spent on maintenance, repairs and improvements by my Department within the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich (the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance and MOD lodger units) during the last 10 years were as follows:

Year	*Maintenance and Repair* £000	*Improvements* £000
1979-80	1,125	188
1980-81	1,083	277
1981-82	1,212	300
1982-83	1,552	357
1983-84	1,802	471
1984-85	2,272	715
1985-86	1,785	1,593
1986-87	1,846	1,584
1987-88	1,749	2,427

The improvements from 1985-86 include expenditure needed to house DGDQA units moved from Harefield, Middlesex and Garland road, Plumstead.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the total area of the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, already declared surplus to requirements and the area of *(a)* the Royal Arsenal west and *(b)* the Royal Arsenal east to be released for redevelopment after the relocation of the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance.

Mr. Sainsbury: The total area of Royal Arsenal, Woolwich is approximately 94 acres; 12 acres in Royal Arsenal west have already been declared surplus to requirements. A further 67 acres in Royal Arsenal west and 15 acres in Royal Arsenal east would be released for redevelopment after the relocation of the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's discussions with the London borough of Greenwich about the future redevelopment of that area of the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, already declared to be surplus to requirements.

Mr. Neubert: Preliminary discussions with the London borough of Greenwich have now been held on site and we plan to have a further meeting shortly where the discussion will widen to include possible uses of the entire area of potentially surplus land at Royal Arsenal west. This follows the decision announced on 9 March 1989 to move the Director General of Defence Quality Assurance from Woolwich to Teesside, a proposal at present the subject of consultation with the trade unions.

I will keep the hon. Member informed of progress.

Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the total estimated cost of transferring the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance from Woolwich Arsenal to Stockton on Tees and the individual costs of the major elements in the relocation package;

(2) what was the total estimated cost of relocating the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance at Woolwich Arsenal.

Mr. Sainsbury: Competitive contracts will be let in connection with these proposals and therefore it would not be prudent to disclose departmental estimates of costs. Nevertheless a recent investment appraisal revealed that the net present values after 25 years and of the costs and benefits that vary with the three options studied were:

	£ million
Continuation on two sites at Woolwich and one at Bromley	212
Collocation at Royal Arsenal west, Woolwich	188
Collocation at Teesside	178

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimates he has made of the numbers of *(a)* mobile and *(b)* non-mobile staff likely to transfer from Woolwich to Stockton on Tees with the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance and the numbers he expects to recruit on Teesside.

Mr. Sainsbury: All staff who wish to transfer with their work would be given the opportunity to do so. Our current impression is that up to about 600 staff, mainly mobile, might transfer from Woolwich and Bromley and other MOD sources and that 900 staff, mainly non-mobile and including 250 apprentices, would be recruited on Teesside.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the other departments currently located with the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance at Woolwich Arsenal, indicating the numbers currently employed at each.

Mr. Sainsbury: The other departments currently located with the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance at Woolwich Arsenal and the numbers currently employed at each are as follows:

Department	*Number of employees*
Naval Publications Store	92
Air Publications and Forms Store	109
RAF Movements Unit (London)	33

Department	Number of employees
RAF Signals Unit	194
Ministry of Defence Police	50
British Library	25
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	49
National Maritime Museum	4
Civil Service Catering Organisation	12
Property Services Agency	66

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the design of a new headquarters building and on other preparations for the relocation of the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance at Woolwich Arsenal.

Mr. Sainsbury: As I indicated in my answer to the hon. Member on 20 April 1988 at columns *503-4*, £300,000 was spent on sketch plans for a new headquarters building at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, for the Quality Assurance Directorate (Ordnance). The identified costs of doing studies on other buildings are £120,000. The departmental costs of the staff carrying out a feasibility study and an investment appraisal on the future location of the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance were incurred in the normal course of their work and have not been separately identified.

Bristol University (Research)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* past, *(b)* present and *(c)* future planned research projects at Bristol university funded wholly or in part by his Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is not our policy to list details of these arrangements; it is for the universities themselves to give details of any involvement that they might have.

Military Vehicles (Explosives)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details of the location of, ammunition carried, injuries suffered, and damage to vehicles sustained in the collisions and breakdowns of military vehicles carrying explosives that occurred on 13 December 1982, 11 January 1983, 11 December 1983, 3 December 1984, 13 May 1985, 3 December 1986, 22 July 1986 and 27 April 1988, as listed in his answer of 10 May 1988, *Official Report*, columns *103-4*.

Mr. Neubert: None of the collisions or breakdowns listed resulted in injury. Minor damage was, however, sustained by vehicles involved in four of the incidents. Details of the locations are as follows:

Date	Route	Location
13 December 1982	A17	Lincolnshire
21 June 1983	A17	Lincolnshire[1]
11 July 1983	M4	Near Junction 13[1]
19 October 1984	Not known	Tidworth to Bulford[1] Range Road, Hampshire
13 May 1985	Not known	Not known
3 December 1985	Not known	Cardigan, Dyfed[1]
22 July 1986	A38	Haldon Hill, Devon
27 April 1988	A38	St. Budeaux, Devon

[1] The dates of these incidents were previously incorrectly recorded.

It is not our practice to provide details of ammunition carried. The remainder of the information requested is not available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details of the locations, type of amunition carried and measures taken to extinguish the fires on lorries loaded wih ammunition listed in his answer of 10 May 1988, *Official Report*, column *104*, that occurred on 24 October 1984, 1 May 1986 and 30 January 1988.

Mr. Neubert: The incident listed on 24 October 1984 occurred near RAF Chilmark in Wiltshire and the incident listed on 1 May 1986 on the M25 20 miles west of Chelmsford. Details of the measures taken to extinguish the fires are not recorded.

For the details of the incident on 30 January 1988, I refer the hon. Member to the answer on 27 April 1988 at column *204*. It is not our practice to provide details of ammunition carried.

RAF Upper Heyford

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when, pursuant to his answer of 7 March 1989, *Official Report*, column *515*, he next expects to visit RAF Upper Heyford.

Mr. Neubert: I intend to visit RAF Upper Heyford on 19 April to announce the results of the full study into the costs and implications of realigning the runway there.

Women

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to alter the rules which prevent women serving in the Army from doing so in combat zones.

Mr. Neubert: It remains our policy that women should not be employed in direct combat roles.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards women serving in Her Majesty's Forces who have had children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: Women with children may apply to join the armed forces. They will be accepted provided that they can satisfy the normal recruitment criteria and show that adequate provision has been made for the care of their children while on duty.

Recruitment (Advertising)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give for the last five years for which information is available, the cost of advertising campaigns for recruitment into all three branches of the armed forces.

Mr. Neubert: The information is as follows:

	£
1984-85	[1]7,351,000
1985-86	8,202,000
1986-87	9,109,000
1987-88	9,402,400
1988-89	[2]14,854,200

[1]The figures for 1984-85 includes not only expenditure on the services' recruitment advertising but also expenditure on some civilian recruiting, range firing notices and defence sales advertising. It is not possible, given the passage of time, to identify the service element alone.

[2]This figure is an estimate as final figures for 1988-89 have not yet been brought to account.

Note:

All figures are at outturn prices.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the estimates for the cost in the current year of the advertising campaigns for recruitment into all three branches of the armed services.

Mr. Neubert: The figures for the current financial year (1989-90) have yet to be finalised. I shall write to the hon. and learned Member when they become available.

Privatisation

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to privatise his Department's research facilities at Aldermaston and Porton Down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: No.

Next Steps Initiative

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to turn any other of his Department's research establishments into executive agencies under the Government's next steps initiative.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 16 March, column *274*, which defined our current plans for executive agencies within the research establishments. In common with other Departments we shall be looking for further opportunities to gain increased efficiency and value for money under the Government's next steps initiative.

Safety Critical Systems

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department's new standards for safety critical systems, DefStan 0055, will require mandatory adherence to formal methods for written software; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The draft defence standard (DefStan 0055) covering the use of software in safety critical applications in defence equipment has yet to be issued for consultation. The extent to which formal methods will be mandatory will be resolved as part of the consultation process.

Safety-related Software

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions are taking place between his Department and the Health and Safety Commission in relation to safety-related software; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: In formulating our approach to safety-related software, officials from the MOD have been —and are—involved in discussions with a wide range of agencies, including the Health and Safety Executive which is the operating arm of the Health and Safety Commission.

Live Submarine Projectiles

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the recent finding of a live submarine projectile on St. Bees beach; and what instructions are issued to submarine commanders in respect of practising with live projectiles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand that the object found on St. Bees beach, Cumbria, was not a submarine projectile but a submarine smoke float. This is a small pyrotechnic device released by a submarine during an exercise which emits smoke upon reaching the surface, thereby indicating the position of the submarine.

Live projectiles, such as missiles or torpedoes, are fired by submarines only on the high seas and a notice of intent is always issued beforehand. Such ammunition is never fired if any surface vessel or aircraft is in the area.

Irish Sea (Incidents)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many incidents have been reported in the Irish sea involving submarines and fishing boats in each of the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of incidents involving Royal Navy submarines and fishing vessels in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Number
1984	1
1985	0
1986	0
1987	1
1988	[1]4

[1] Includes 2 yachts.

There have been no incidents so far this year.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 April 1989

NATIONAL FINANCE

MEPs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what payments are made to European Members of Parliament for *(a)* salary, *(b)* office, research and secretarial allowances, *(c)* daily allowances for attending meetings on parliamentary business and *(d)* allowance per mile for travel on parliamentary business, expressed in (i) pounds sterling and (ii) European currency units.

Mr. Brooke: The European Assembly (Pay and Pensions) Act 1979 stipulates that salary payable to United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament shall be the same as a member of this Parliament's ordinary salary (currently £24,107) except that, where an MEP is also a member of this Parliament, he or she will receive only one third of that salary in addition to his or her Member of Parliament's salary. The Act also stipulates that the salary be paid into a United Kingdom bank account in sterling.

The European Parliament has laid down a number of allowances for its Members to defray the expenses which they incur in the performance of their parliamentary duties. These allowances are as follows at 1 January 1989 (sterling rates are approximate and will vary with exchange rate fluctuations; the rates used here are based on the average for 1988: £1·0=ecu 1·51):

(1) *General Expenditure Allowances*

Ecu 2,246 per month (£ sterling 1,487). This allowance is intended to defray, for example, Members' expenses on office management costs, telephone, postage and travel within their member state. In respect of Members who, for no valid reason, have failed to attend half the number of plenary sittings, the allowance is halved.

(2) *Secretarial-Assistance Allowance*

Up to ecu 3,635 (£ sterling 2,407) per month. This allowance is intended to defray the expenses arising from the employment or the engagement of the services of one or more assistants. It is paid only upon production of supporting contracts.

(3) *Subsistence Allowance*

The daily allowances are:

(a) For travel within the Community 156 ecu (£ sterling 103).

(b) For travel outside the Community 78 ecu (£ sterling 52).

(4) *Travel Allowance*

(a) For official travel within the Community:
0·6 ecu (40 pence) per km (1 km=0·62 miles) for the first 400 km of both inward and outward journeys; and
0·32 ecu (21 pence) per km thereafter.

(b) For official travel outside the Community:
return air fare by the most direct route on presentation of the ticket, plus a lump sum travel allowance (as at *(a)* above) in respect of the journey between the point of departure and the nearest international airport.

Children

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in work and responsible for children will have earnings below the tax threshold in the current year.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In 1989-90, it is estimated that some 1·8 million people in work (including part-time workers and self-employed) with children earn less than the weekly equivalent of the personal allowance to which they are entitled. Of these, 1·4 million are married women. This suggests that there are 400,000 tax units with children, where the head of the household is in work and has earnings below the tax threshold.

These estimates are based on projections to 1989-90 of weekly earnings recorded in the 1986 family expenditure survey.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many tax-paying units in the current year will contain children; and how many will be *(a)* married couples with the wife earning and *(b)* single-parent families with earned income.

Mr. Norman Lamont: In 1989-90, it is estimated that there are some 5·3 million taxpaying tax units with children. Of these 3·4 million are married couples where the wife has earned income and 0·3 million are working single-parent families. These estimates are based on projections of data collected in the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes and 1986 family expenditure survey.

Retirement Pensions (Tax)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the percentage of income tax revenue received from income tax paid on retirement pensions.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 14 November 1988 at column 525.

Age Allowance

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many people will benefit by the extension of the higher rate of age allowance to those aged 75 and over;

(2) if he will estimate the number of people who will benefit from the extension of the higher age allowance to those aged 75 and over in *(a)* the Brighton travel-to-work area, *(b)* the parliamentary constituency of Brighton, Kemptown and *(c)* the parliamentary constituency of Brighton, Pavilion.

Mr. Norman Lamont: It is estimated that in 1989-90 about 400,000 single people and married couples, will benefit from the proposed extension of the higher level of age allowance to those aged 75 and over. Estimates are based on a projection of the 1986-87 survey of personal incomes and are provisional. I regret that corresponding information for Brighton and the surrounding area is not available.

Scottish Grand Committee

Mr. Steel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost to public funds of the visit of a Lords

Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, the hon. Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean) to the meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Edinburgh on Monday 20 March; and from which vote the expense was met.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* I understand that the visit in question was made in connection with ministerial business. Consequently, the cost will be borne on the Cabinet Office (OMCS) Vote. Details of the cost of the visit are not yet available.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Medical Research Council

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much of the Medical Research Council's 1988-89 and 1989-90 budgets were committed to research on *(a)* mental health and *(b)* schizophrenia; and what percentages these figures represent of the total budgets.

Mr. Jackson: The most recent information available is for 1987-88, and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to him on 28 November at column *82-83*.

Polytechnics

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's policy on the re-location of existing polytechnics from Inner London.

Mr. Jackson: It is for the institutions in the first instance, in collaboration with the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council, to consider whether relocation would assist them in meeting their aims and objectives, and help secure more effective and economical provision of higher education in London, the south-east region and nationally. The PCFC is responsible for the effective investment in higher education of the substantial sums of public money available to the sector, and the Government look to the council to help secure, through its arrangements for the allocation of grant to institutions, higher education which meets the needs of students both regionally and nationally.

Dyslexia

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many specialist teachers are provided for dyslexic children by Liverpool local education authority; what is the number per thousand pupils; what are the comparable figures in other local education authorities in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: This information is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if his Department has recommended that local education authorities provide a minimum standard of specialist teaching for dyslexic children; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the provision of specialist teaching for dyslexic children.

Mr. Butcher: Under the 1981 Education Act, local education authorities are required to identify children with special educational needs and to make appropriate educational provision for them. In the exercise of these statutory duties, it is for individual local education authorities to decide on the level of employment of teachers and their deployment.

National Union of Students

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many responses he has received concerning his inquiry into the status of the National Union of Students; what was the balance of opinion in these responses; and if he will list the organisations and institutions that have responded, and place their responses in the Library.

Mr. Jackson: My Department has conducted a survey on student unions and their links with the National Union of Students. Factual information was sought and received from 70 institutions of further and higher education. In addition, since the announcement of the survey in April 1988, we have received 109 separate representations about the National Union of Students, either in correspondence from the general public or forwarded by hon. Members on behalf of their constituents. Of these, 66 (60·6 per cent.) were in favour of a change in the status of the National Union of Students, 43 (39·4 per cent.) against.

As I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) on 10 June 1988 at column 691, I do not consider it appropriate to deposit such correspondence in the Library.

Academics (Earnings)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply of 4 April, *Official Report*, column 7, what evidence he has that the earnings of academics have increased in the same way as the earnings of other people.

Mr. Jackson: The Department does not collect information about the levels of non-pay earnings among academics.

Parent Registers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all those organisations who are to be allowed access to the parent registers presently being compiled by local education authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: There is no legal requirement for local education authorities to compile parent registers. Access by local education authorities to school admission registers is governed by section 80 of the Education Act 1944 and the Pupils Registration Regulations 1956, as amended, which limit access to authorised officers and for the purposes of the Education Acts. Legislation and regulations on the community charge require local education authorities to supply information about individuals to community charge registration officers only where it is within their possession or control.

National Curriculum

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date his Department's document "National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice" was made available to schools in England.

Mrs. Rumbold: "From Policy to Practice" was published on 23 February and copies were sent directly to maintained schools in England during the first week in March.

Expenditure

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the proportion of gross domestic product in 1975, 1979, 1983, and the latest available year which was represented by public expenditure on *(a)* schools for ages 5 to 16 years; *(b)* pre-five education; *(c)* further education and training; *(d)* higher education by each of the countries of the European Community, other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, on the best available and most comparable data.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Some relevant data are given in the "UNESCO Statistical Yearbook" for 1988, tables 4.1 and 4.3 (pages 4.5 to 4.22 and 4.44 to 4.55). A copy is in the Library. Some care is needed in interpreting the figures, because countries have differing procedures for allocating expenditure between the various levels of education, and these procedures may have changed over the years.

Teacher Training

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total cost in 1988-89 of (i) initial teacher training and (ii) in-service training, of teachers.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Funding for higher education institutions is not allocated according to subject. However, an estimated £145 million, including fees, was made available to institutions in England and Wales for initial teacher training in the financial year 1988-89. It will be for institutions to decide on how they spend the resources at their disposal. In addition, the total cost of the maintenance element of mandatory awards in respect of students on initial teacher training courses is estimated at around £49 million. In the same year, local education authorities in England planned to spend £290 million on in-service training for teachers and others employed in the education service.

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has conducted any research into *(a)* the cause and *(b)* the treatment of systemic lupus erythematosus.

Mr. Jackson: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from this Department, is the main agency through which the Government support medical research. It is funding research into the cause of systemic lupus erythematosus at its clinical research centre and at the clinical science laboratory of Guy's medical school. Other relevant research may also be supported by university medical schools from their general funding.

Higher Education (Access)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps the Government are taking to widen access to higher education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Access courses provide an important means of increasing the participation in higher education of mature students without the traditional qualifications for entry to degree courses. My Department has encouraged the Council for National Academic Awards and the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to devise a national framework for the recognition of such courses, and a steering committee was established to oversee this work. That committee has now proposed a transbinary framework to be administered by a central body which will invite higher education institutions and consortia validating access courses to apply for a franchise through which their courses will acquire a 'kitemark' of national recognition. I have written to the chairman of the CNAA, Sir Bryan Nicholson, and to the chairman of the CVCP, Sir Mark Richmond, to invite the CNAA and CVCP jointly to administer the recognition scheme on behalf of both the universities and the polytechnics and colleges. The establishment of a national framework marks an important step towards improving access opportunities for mature students.

Nursery and Primary Education

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many nursery school places have been available in each local authority for each of the last 10 years both as a total number and as a percentage of all three and four-year-olds.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Information on nursery school places is not collected centrally. The number of pupils under five in maintained nursery schools and the percentage of the estimated three and four-year-old population in January of each year from 1979 to 1988 in each local education authority in England is given in the table. The figures do not include pupils in nursery classes in primary schools.

Number of pupils under five in maintained nursery schools January each year

	1979	
	pupils	*percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4*
Barking	0	0
Barnet	426	6·4
Bexley	175	3·3
Brent	282	4·7
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	316	4·2
Ealing	438	6·3
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	247	4·9
Harrow	92	1·9
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	80	1·5
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	233	7·9
Merton	399	11·1
Newham	1,074	18·1
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	50	1·5
Sutton	220	5·7
Waltham Forest	433	7·9
ILEA	3,876	8·0
Birmingham	2,122	8·4
Coventry	274	3·4
Dudley	562	7·5
Sandwell	223	2·9
Solihull	0	0

	1979 pupils	1979 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Walsall	893	13·0
Wolverhampton	842	12·6
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	591	5·0
St. Helens	63	1·2
Sefton	291	4·1
Wirral	251	2·9
Bolton	566	8·0
Bury	138	2·9
Manchester	383	3·7
Oldham	182	3·1
Rochdale	812	13·9
Salford	582	9·9
Stockport	667	9·1
Tameside	307	5·4
Trafford	76	1·4
Wigan	247	2·8
Barnsley	320	5·7
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	362	5·4
Sheffield	658	5·6
Bradford	670	5·3
Calderdale	73	1·5
Kirklees	883	8·8
Leeds	284	1·6
Wakefield	503	6·4
Gateshead	121	2·4
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	533	8·7
North Tyneside	239	5·2
South Tyneside	817	22·3
Sunderland	786	10·1
Avon	1,425	6·7
Bedfordshire	1,192	8·4
Berkshire	1,661	9·4
Buckinghamshire	498	3·3
Cambridgeshire	735	4·8
Cheshire	655	2·8
Cleveland	659	4·3
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	98	1·0
Cumbria	658	5·8
Derbyshire	975	4·4
Devon	91	0·4
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,034	13·9
East Sussex	245	2·0
Essex	247	0·6
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	240	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	40	0·2
Hertfordshire	1,734	7·4
Humberside	926	4·2
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	84	0·2
Lancashire	3,010	8·9
Leicestershire	48	0·2
Lincolnshire	319	2·3
Norfolk	340	2·0
North Yorkshire	282	1·9
Northamptonshire	547	3·8
Northumberland	140	1·9
Nottinghamshire	465	1·9
Oxfordshire	780	6·0
Shropshire	220	2·2
Somerset	77	0·8
Staffordshire	1,839	7·0
Suffolk	122	0·8
Surrey	483	2·1
Warwickshire	578	4·8
West Sussex	368	2·6
Wiltshire	0	0
England	48,477	4·3

	1980 pupils	1980 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	428	6·6
Bexley	175	3·4
Brent	246	4·2
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	334	4·6
Ealing	458	6·7
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	227	4·7
Harrow	50	1·1
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	80	1·5
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	234	8·1
Merton	208	5·9
Newham	1,062	18·6
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	58	1·9
Sutton	228	6·2
Waltham Forest	438	8·3
ILEA	3,808	8·1
Birmingham	2,086	8·5
Coventry	244	3·2
Dudley	537	7·6
Sandwell	213	2·9
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	883	13·6
Wolverhampton	832	13·0
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	558	4·9
St. Helens	74	1·5
Sefton	298	4·4
Wirral	252	3·1
Bolton	582	8·7
Bury	134	3·0
Manchester	387	3·9
Oldham	181	3·2
Rochdale	840	14·7
Salford	687	12·5
Stockport	660	9·4
Tameside	295	5·6
Trafford	75	1·5
Wigan	247	3·0
Barnsley	326	6·2
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	372	5·8
Sheffield	665	6·0
Bradford	672	5·4
Calderdale	77	1·7
Kirklees	879	9·2
Leeds	268	1·6
Wakefield	537	7·2
Gateshead	124	2·6
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	579	9·7
North Tyneside	231	5·4
South Tyneside	882	25·2
Sunderland	734	9·8
Avon	1,428	6·9
Bedfordshire	1,258	9·2
Berkshire	1,693	9·8
Buckinghamshire	477	3·2
Cambridgeshire	711	4·8
Cheshire	670	3·0
Cleveland	701	4·7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	98	1·0
Cumbria	666	6·2
Derbyshire	1,028	4·8
Devon	91	0·5
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,054	14·6
East Sussex	254	2·1
Essex	246	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	256	0·7

	1980 pupils	1980 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Hereford and Worcester	40	0·3
Hertfordshire	1,659	7·3
Humberside	941	4·5
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	82	0·2
Lancashire	3,018	9·2
Leicestershire	49	0·2
Lincolnshire	326	2·5
Norfolk	351	2·2
North Yorkshire	287	2·0
Northamptonshire	539	3·8
Northumberland	130	1·8
Nottinghamshire	458	2·0
Oxfordshire	801	6·4
Shropshire	224	2·4
Somerset	64	0·7
Staffordshire	1,827	7·4
Suffolk	132	0·9
Surrey	488	2·2
Warwickshire	590	5·1
West Sussex	374	2·7
Wiltshire	0	0
England	48,456	4·4

	1981 Pupils	1981 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	452	7·2
Bexley	175	3·6
Brent	252	4·4
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	334	4·6
Ealing	526	8·0
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	217	4·6
Harrow	50	1·1
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	87	1·7
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	230	8·2
Merton	208	6·1
Newham	1,008	18·0
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	72	2·4
Sutton	228	6·2
Waltham Forest	443	8·5
ILEA	3,751	8·1
Birmingham	2,126	8·8
Coventry	392	5·2
Dudley	503	7·3
Sandwell	209	2·9
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	815	13·1
Wolverhampton	818	13·4
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	561	5·0
St. Helens	73	1·6
Sefton	278	4·2
Wirral	251	3·2
Bolton	586	9·0
Bury	127	3·0
Manchester	365	3·8
Oldham	179	3·3
Rochdale	838	15·0
Salford	706	13·3
Stockport	696	10·2
Tameside	287	5·6

	1981 Pupils	1981 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Trafford	80	1·6
Wigan	227	2·9
Barnsley	345	6·8
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	340	5·5
Sheffield	713	6·7
Bradford	641	5·1
Calderdale	70	1·6
Kirklees	713	7·6
Leeds	268	1·7
Wakefield	520	7·1
Gateshead	115	2·4
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	573	9·7
North Tyneside	242	5·6
South Tyneside	831	24·4
Sunderland	749	10·0
Avon	1,452	7·3
Bedfordshire	1,260	9·1
Berkshire	1,709	10·1
Buckinghamshire	492	3·3
Cambridgeshire	658	4·5
Cheshire	740	3·3
Cleveland	452	3·1
Cornwall + Isles of Scilly	99	1·1
Cumbria	625	6·0
Derbyshire	1,023	4·9
Devon	154	0·8
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,089	14·8
East Sussex	273	2·4
Essex	246	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	257	0·8
Hereford and Worcester	0	0·0
Hertfordshire	1,651	7·4
Humberside	951	4·7
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	82	0·2
Lancashire	3,099	9·8
Leicestershire	49	0·2
Lincolnshire	329	2·6
Norfolk	351	2·3
North Yorkshire	302	2·1
Northamptonshire	467	3·4
Northumberland	117	1·7
Nottinghamshire	482	2·2
Oxfordshire	806	6·6
Shropshire	224	2·5
Somerset	27	0·3
Staffordshire	1,820	7·6
Suffolk	131	0·9
Surrey	486	2·3
Warwickshire	584	5·4
West Sussex	397	2·9
Wiltshire	0	0
England	48,154	4·5

	1982 Pupils	1982 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	472	7·3
Bexley	175	3·6
Brent	267	4·5
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	358	4·8
Ealing	622	9·1
Enfield	0	0

	1982 Pupils	1982 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Haringey	227	5·0
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	107	2·0
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	230	7·9
Merton	207	5·9
Newham	1,046	18·4
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	70	2·3
Sutton	231	6·2
Waltham Forest	452	8·5
ILEA	3,916	8·2
Birmingham	2,161	8·7
Coventry	360	4·8
Dudley	545	7·8
Sandwell	155	2·2
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	855	13·6
Wolverhampton	807	13·0
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	526	4·6
St. Helens	78	1·7
Sefton	315	4·8
Wirral	256	3·2
Bolton	598	9·1
Bury	136	3·2
Manchester	385	3·8
Oldham	79	1·4
Rochdale	846	14·8
Salford	752	14·2
Stockport	742	10·9
Tameside	306	6·0
Trafford	79	1·6
Wigan	241	3·1
Barnsley	147	2·9
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	332	5·4
Sheffield	732	6·8
Bradford	672	5·3
Calderdale	71	1·6
Kirklees	863	9·2
Leeds	281	1·8
Wakefield	517	7·1
Gateshead	53	1·1
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	565	9·4
North Tyneside	259	5·9
South Tyneside	762	22·4
Sunderland	817	10·6
Avon	1,410	6·9
Bedfordshire	1,367	9·6
Berkshire	1,715	9·9
Buckinghamshire	501	3·3
Cambridgeshire	640	4·3
Cheshire	757	3·4
Cleveland	441	2·9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	96	1·0
Cumbria	642	6·2
Derbyshire	1,099	5·2
Devon	144	0·7
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,121	14·9
East Sussex	262	2·2
Essex	246	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	255	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,704	7·6
Humberside	951	4·7
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	85	0·2
Lancashire	3,195	10·0
Leicestershire	48	0·2
Lincolnshire	342	2·7
Norfolk	332	2·2
North Yorkshire	308	2·2
Northamptonshire	474	3·4
Northumberland	126	1·8
Nottinghamshire	476	2·1
Oxfordshire	834	6·8
Shropshire	238	2·6
Somerset	30	0·3
Staffordshire	1,813	7·4
Suffolk	127	0·9
Surrey	485	2·3
Warwickshire	605	5·5
West Sussex	447	3·1
Wiltshire	0	0
England	48,989	4·5

	1983 Pupils	1983 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	489	7·2
Bexley	175	3·4
Brent	277	4·5
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	384	4·9
Ealing	626	8·8
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	226	4·8
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	101	1·8
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	231	7·7
Merton	208	5·6
Newham	1,038	17·6
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	70	2·2
Sutton	232	6·0
Waltham Forest	431	7·7
ILEA	4,015	8·1
Birmingham	2,092	8·0
Coventry	387	4·9
Dudley	475	6·4
Sandwell	157	2·1
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	848	12·7
Wolverhampton	823	12·7
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	565	4·8
St. Helens	74	1·5
Sefton	312	4·5
Wirral	240	2·8
Bolton	599	8·6
Bury	157	3·5
Manchester	386	3·6
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	870	14·3
Salford	776	13·9
Stockport	736	10·2
Tameside	318	5·9
Trafford	80	1·5
Wigan	183	2·3
Barnsley	165	3·1
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	331	5·0
Sheffield	741	6·5
Bradford	571	4·2
Calderdale	97	2·0
Kirklees	849	8·6

	1983 Pupils	1983 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Leeds	272	1·6
Wakefield	478	6·2
Gateshead	59	1·2
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	592	9·4
North Tyneside	307	6·7
South Tyneside	806	22·4
Sunderland	905	11·2
Avon	1,477	6·9
Bedfordshire	1,358	9·1
Berkshire	1,740	9·5
Buckinghamshire	507	3·1
Cambridgeshire	647	4·0
Cheshire	796	3·4
Cleveland	445	2·8
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	103	1·1
Cumbria	681	6·2
Derbyshire	1,115	5·0
Devon	142	0·7
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,206	14·7
East Sussex	272	2·2
Essex	248	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	257	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0·0
Hertfordshire	1,720	7·2
Humberside	983	4·6
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	87	0·2
Lancashire	3,229	9·5
Leicestershire	48	0·2
Lincolnshire	358	2·7
Norfolk	365	2·2
North Yorkshire	311	2·1
Northamptonshire	494	3·3
Northumberland	155	2·0
Nottinghamshire	513	2·1
Oxfordshire	794	6·0
Shropshire	157	1·6
Somerset	28	0·3
Staffordshire	1,838	7·1
Suffolk	144	0·9
Surrey	502	2·2
Warwickshire	623	5·3
West Sussex	454	3·0
Wiltshire	0	0
England	49,551	4·3

	1984 Pupils	1984 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	496	7·0
Bexley	174	3·2
Brent	281	4·3
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	426	5·2
Ealing	630	8·2
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	219	4·5
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	119	2·0
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	237	7·7
Merton	209	5·4
Newham	982	16·1
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	75	2·1

	1984 Pupils	1984 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Sutton	233	5·6
Waltham Forest	373	6·4
ILEA	4,075	7·8
Birmingham	1,973	7·2
Coventry	402	4·9
Dudley	472	6·1
Sandwell	159	2·0
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	790	11·1
Wolverhampton	831	12·4
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	528	4·2
St. Helens	75	1·5
Sefton	311	4·3
Wirral	263	2·9
Bolton	614	8·3
Bury	152	3·3
Manchester	425	3·8
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	891	14·1
Salford	780	13·2
Stockport	759	10·1
Tameside	335	5·9
Trafford	0	0
Wigan	183	2·2
Barnsley	161	2·9
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	340	4·9
Sheffield	735	6·1
Bradford	565	3·8
Calderdale	91	1·8
Kirklees	751	7·3
Leeds	265	1·5
Wakefield	500	6·2
Gateshead	59	1·1
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	593	8·9
North Tyneside	287	5·9
South Tyneside	807	20·7
Sunderland	927	10·9
Avon	1,465	6·6
Bedfordshire	1,366	8·7
Berkshire	1,809	9·3
Buckinghamshire	519	3·0
Cambridgeshire	633	3·8
Cheshire	810	3·3
Cleveland	360	2·2
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	96	1·0
Cumbria	705	6·1
Derbyshire	1,119	4·8
Devon	140	0·6
Dorset	0	0·0
Durham	2,303	15·0
East Sussex	274	2·1
Essex	255	0·6
Gloucestershire	0	0·0
Hampshire	256	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0·0
Hertfordshire	1,728	6·9
Humberside	889	4·1
Isle of Wight	0	0·0
Kent	79	0·2
Lancashire	3,330	9·4
Leicestershire	50	0·2
Lincolnshire	393	2·8
Norfolk	363	2·1
North Yorkshire	320	2·1
Northamptonshire	499	3·3
Northumberland	156	2·0
Nottinghamshire	560	2·2
Oxfordshire	539	3·9
Shropshire	188	1·9
Somerset	0	0·0
Staffordshire	1,879	6·9
Suffolk	172	1·1

	1984 Pupils	1984 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Surrey	497	2·1
Warwickshire	649	5·4
West Sussex	452	2·9
Wiltshire	0	0·0
ENGLAND	49,406	4·1

	1985 pupils	1985 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	500	6·9
Bexley	175	3·2
Brent	271	3·9
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	410	5·1
Ealing	605	7·4
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	216	4·2
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	116	1·9
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	238	7·7
Merton	180	4·4
Newham	962	14·8
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	62	1·6
Sutton	233	5·6
Waltham Forest	339	5·8
ILEA	4,208	7·4
Birmingham	2,187	7·9
Coventry	391	4·9
Dudley	481	6·2
Sandwell	155	1·9
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	753	10·6
Wolverhampton	824	12·3
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	555	4·3
St. Helens	70	1·5
Sefton	315	4·6
Wirral	221	2·5
Bolton	618	8·2
Bury	146	3·3
Manchester	512	4·3
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	894	14·0
Salford	812	13·8
Stockport	773	10·7
Tameside	325	5·5
Trafford	0	0
Wigan	190	2·4
Barnsley	167	3·0
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	365	5·1
Sheffield	731	6·1
Bradford	592	3·9
Calderdale	95	1·9
Kirklees	713	7·0
Leeds	273	1·6
Wakefield	472	5·8
Gateshead	58	1·1
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	579	8·4
North Tyneside	276	5·5
South Tyneside	797	19·9
Sunderland	933	11·2
Avon	1,465	6·7
Bedfordshire	1,387	8·8
Berkshire	1,941	10·0

	1985 pupils	1985 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Buckinghamshire	514	3·0
Cambridgeshire	631	3·8
Cheshire	816	3·5
Cleveland	279	1·7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	91	0·9
Cumbria	701	6·2
Derbyshire	1,127	4·9
Devon	141	0·7
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,272	15·3
East Sussex	290	2·2
Essex	259	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	259	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,734	7·2
Humberside	897	4·3
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	90	0·2
Lancashire	3,386	9·7
Leicestershire	49	0·2
Lincolnshire	335	2·5
Norfolk	375	2·3
North Yorkshire	322	2·1
Northamptonshire	504	3·4
Northumberland	131	1·8
Nottinghamshire	557	2·3
Oxfordshire	494	3·5
Shropshire	160	1·7
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	1,836	6·7
Suffolk	157	1·0
Surrey	506	2·2
Warwickshire	665	5·8
West Sussex	454	2·9
Wiltshire	0	0
ENGLAND	49,613	4·1

	1986 pupils	1986 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	495	6·8
Bexley	175	3·4
Brent	268	3·9
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	411	4·8
Ealing	610	7·7
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	213	4·0
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	117	2·0
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	238	7·7
Merton	173	4·2
Newham	979	15·5
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	68	1·9
Sutton	240	5·9
Waltham Forest	292	5·0
ILEA	4,152	7·6
Birmingham	2,245	8·1
Coventry	464	5·7
Dudley	471	6·4
Sandwell	208	2·6
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	770	11·7
Wolverhampton	810	12·3

	1986 pupils	1986 percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	548	4·6
St. Helens	76	1·6
Sefton	316	4·5
Wirral	219	2·6
Bolton	601	8·4
Bury	142	3·2
Manchester	540	4·7
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	885	14·5
Salford	870	15·0
Stockport	779	10·7
Tameside	324	5·9
Trafford	0	0
Wigan	199	2·4
Barnsley	173	3·0
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	352	5·2
Sheffield	722	6·3
Bradford	510	3·6
Calderdale	87	1·8
Kirklees	699	6·7
Leeds	275	1·6
Wakefield	484	6·1
Gateshead	64	1·3
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	586	8·9
North Tyneside	315	6·7
South Tyneside	688	18·6
Sunderland	927	11·0
Avon	1,461	6·6
Bedfordshire	1,320	8·7
Berkshire	1,938	9·9
Buckinghamshire	515	3·1
Cambridgeshire	635	3·9
Cheshire	819	3·4
Cleveland	156	1·0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	94	1·0
Cumbria	694	6·1
Derbyshire	1,129	5·0
Devon	247	1·1
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,266	14·9
East Sussex	296	2·1
Essex	249	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	260	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,701	6·8
Humberside	910	4·2
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	84	0·2
Lancashire	3,358	9·5
Leicestershire	50	0·2
Lincolnshire	284	2·1
Norfolk	393	2·4
North Yorkshire	315	2·0
Northamptonshire	503	3·4
Northumberland	136	1·8
Nottinghamshire	536	2·2
Oxfordshire	502	3·6
Shropshire	160	1·6
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	1,844	7·0
Suffolk	167	1·1
Surrey	404	1·8
Warwickshire	726	6·2
West Sussex	451	2·9
Wiltshire	0	0
ENGLAND	49,383	4·2

	1987 Pupils	1987 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	520	6·9
Bexley	175	3·4
Brent	278	3·9
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	404	4·8
Ealing	577	7·0
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	201	3·5
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	120	2·0
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	244	7·9
Merton	0	0
Newham	952	13·8
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	61	1·7
Sutton	240	5·7
Waltham Forest	329	5·5
ILEA	4,150	7·0
Birmingham	2,302	8·0
Coventry	445	5·4
Dudley	398	5·4
Sandwell	203	2·5
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	727	11·0
Wolverhampton	830	12·6
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	550	4·5
St. Helens	73	1·6
Sefton	319	4·6
Wirral	226	2·6
Bolton	549	7·4
Bury	145	3·2
Manchester	540	4·4
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	910	14·9
Salford	862	14·4
Stockport	771	10·7
Tameside	332	5·9
Trafford	0	0
Wigan	193	2·4
Barnsley	175	3·1
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	336	4·9
Sheffield	714	6·2
Bradford	515	3·6
Calderdale	88	1·8
Kirklees	666	6·4
Leeds	274	1·6
Wakefield	464	5·7
Gateshead	52	1·1
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	621	9·3
North Tyneside	286	6·4
South Tyneside	695	19·3
Sunderland	964	11·3
Avon	1,459	6·5
Bedfordshire	1,356	8·9
Berkshire	2,015	10·2
Buckinghamshire	512	3·1
Cambridgeshire	655	4·1
Cheshire	828	3·5
Cleveland	156	1·0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	92	1·0
Cumbria	738	6·5
Derbyshire	1,162	5·2
Devon	257	1·2
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,405	16·0
East Sussex	285	2·1
Essex	254	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	258	0·7

	1987 Pupils	1987 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,663	6·8
Humberside	946	4·4
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	78	0·2
Lancashire	3,400	9·4
Leicestershire	50	0·2
Lincolnshire	282	2·1
Norfolk	382	2·4
North Yorkshire	314	2·0
Northamptonshire	502	3·4
Northumberland	134	1·8
Nottinghamshire	500	2·4
Oxfordshire	496	3·5
Shropshire	160	1·7
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	1,843	7·0
Suffolk	162	1·1
Surrey	420	1·9
Warwickshire	730	6·3
West Sussex	452	3·0
Wiltshire	0	0
England	49,502	4·2

	1988 Pupils	1988 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Barking	0	0
Barnet	500	6·6
Bexley	174	3·2
Brent	274	3·9
Bromley	0	0
Croydon	400	4·8
Ealing	535	6·6
Enfield	0	0
Haringey	246	4·6
Harrow	0	0
Havering	0	0
Hillingdon	120	2·0
Hounslow	0	0
Kingston-upon-Thames	236	7·6
Merton	0	0
Newham	972	14·5
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	64	1·8
Sutton	240	5·9
Waltham Forest	329	5·5
ILEA	4,232	7·2
Birmingham	2,317	8·1
Coventry	443	5·3
Dudley	401	5·4
Sandwell	209	2·6
Solihull	0	0
Walsall	755	11·1
Wolverhampton	843	12·8
Knowsley	0	0
Liverpool	560	4·6
St. Helens	66	1·4
Sefton	315	4·4
Wirral	262	3·0
Bolton	553	7·5
Bury	161	3·6
Manchester	535	4·4
Oldham	0	0
Rochdale	910	14·7
Salford	845	14·3
Stockport	766	10·4
Tameside	322	5·6
Trafford	0	0

	1988 Pupils	1988 Percentage of estimated population aged 3 and 4
Wigan	186	2·3
Barnsley	181	3·2
Doncaster	0	0
Rotherham	355	5·2
Sheffield	738	6·3
Bradford	502	3·5
Calderdale	88	1·7
Kirklees	651	6·3
Leeds	254	1·5
Wakefield	463	5·8
Gateshead	50	1·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	623	8·9
North Tyneside	291	6·2
South Tyneside	713	18·8
Sunderland	949	11·3
Avon	1,420	6·3
Bedfordshire	1,329	8·8
Berkshire	2,021	9·9
Buckinghamshire	512	3·0
Cambridgeshire	637	3·8
Cheshire	838	3·4
Cleveland	153	1·0
Cornwall + Isles of Scilly	101	1·0
Cumbria	758	6·6
Derbyshire	1,217	5·4
Devon	255	1·1
Dorset	0	0
Durham	2,463	16·5
East Sussex	284	2·0
Essex	252	0·7
Gloucestershire	0	0
Hampshire	260	0·7
Hereford and Worcester	0	0
Hertfordshire	1,733	6·9
Humberside	963	4·4
Isle of Wight	0	0
Kent	81	0·2
Lancashire	3,399	9·4
Leicestershire	50	0·2
Lincolnshire	286	2·2
Norfolk	399	2·4
North Yorkshire	308	2·0
Northamptonshire	525	3·6
Northumberland	137	1·8
Nottinghamshire	575	2·3
Oxfordshire	499	3·4
Shropshire	166	1·7
Somerset	0	0
Staffordshire	1,824	6·9
Suffolk	95	0·6
Surrey	416	1·7
Warwickshire	755	6·5
West Sussex	446	2·9
Wiltshire	0	0
England	49,786	4·2

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Tropical Forests

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he has reached a conclusion on the proposals put forward by the Timber Trade Federation to help countries with tropical forests to adopt practical forest management policies.

Mr. Alan Clark: Officials in Whitehall are still considering the proposal put forward by the Timber Trade Federation for a levy on imports of timber from the

tropical forests, particularly in the context of the effectiveness and cost of such a scheme, GATT and generalised scheme of preference tariff levels, and its acceptability on an international level.

Spirits

Mr. Sims: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received a copy of the European Community Spirits Producers Association's submission to the European Community Commission detailing the European Community spirit industry's objectives for the removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers facing their products during the current Uruguay round of general agreement on tariffs and trade negotiations; and if he will make it his policy to give maximum support to these objectives.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes. We have urged the Commission to give full weight in the Community's negotiating objectives to this submission and other representations from United Kingdom interests.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether during the recent visit of the Minister for Trade, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), to Austria, he raised with the Austrian authorities the problem of the proposed definition and labelling requirements for Scotch whisky; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes, I raised it with the Austrian Minister for Economic Affairs on 7 March. The Austrian authorities are actively pursuing this matter and I am optimistic that they will reach a solution that will satisfy the concerns of the United Kingdom industry.

LINK Initiatives

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what resources were devoted to the LINK initiatives in 1988; and what resources are being committed in 1989.

Mr. Forth: Total Government funding authorised under the 10 LINK programmes announced in 1988 amounted to £59·3 million; additional support for programmes to be launched in 1989 is expected to exceed £70 million.

House of Fraser

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his urgent and thorough investigation of the leaking of the departmental inspectors' report on the acquisition of the House of Fraser.

Mr. Maude: The investigation is continuing.

Inner Cities

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on recent developments in the inner cities initiative.

Mr. Newton: Since the launch of Action for Cities in March 1988 progress in the inner cities has been immensely encouraging. Unemployment has fallen by more than 20 per cent. major improvements in training, housing and the infrastructure are taking place and the Government's commitment to its Action for Cities programmes has increased to £3·5 billion for 1989-90.

Particularly encouraging are the increasing involvement and commitment of the private sector, and the growing extent of partnership between public authorities, the private sector, voluntary bodies and local people.

On 9 March this year I launched the report "Progress on Cities", which gives a more detailed picture of recent achievements in inner city areas.

Post Office

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about the future of the Post Office monopoly.

Mr. Forth: I have received a number of representations in recent months from Members of Parliament and from organisations and individuals proposing changes in the Post Office letter monopoly, including proposals to lower the monopoly price level or temporarily to suspend the monopoly. We keep the monopoly under review taking account of the representations received and have made clear that we would seriously consider suspending the monopoly in the event of a cessation or serious decline in the quality of the letter service.

Airbus Industrie

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the future financial prospects for Airbus Industrie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Airbus Industrie has more than 700 orders, options and commitments for its new A320 aircraft. It has some 250 orders, options and commitments for its planned A330 and A340 aircraft. A new management structure was inaugurated from 1 April 1989, with the aim of improving Airbus Industrie's efficiency and profitability. The future prospects of the consortium seem as bright now as at any time during its existence.

Petrol Sales

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will refer to the Director General of Fair Trading the practice of petrol companies of putting up the price of leaded petrol rather than cutting the price of unleaded petrol in the light of the Budget tax changes.

Mr. Maude: No. The Government take the view that the level of petrol prices is a commercial matter for the companies involved. The Director General of Fair Trading has referred the wholesale supply of petrol to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The Commission is due to report by 8 November.

Privatisation (Accounting Practices)

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which of the accounting practices employed on privatisation schemes since 1979 have been criticised in Department of Trade and Industry reports.

Mr. Maude: None.

Ford Sierra (Manufacture)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) of 6 February, *Official Report*, columns *458-59*, whether he has received any information from the Ford Motor company relating to the effect on the balance of payments of the transfer of the manufacture of Sierra vehicles.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has regular discussions with Ford about its manufacturing strategy and has recently discussed the transfer of Sierra production to Genk and the associated increase of Fiesta production at Dagenham. However, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade replied to the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) on 6 February at columns *458-59*, the balance of payments impact of these changes will depend on a large number of variables.

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the increase in productivity in manufacturing industry per employee from 1979 to the latest figures available, expressed as a percentage.

Mr. Forth: In the three months to January 1989 manufacturing productivity, as measured by output per person employed, was 49 per cent. higher than the 1979 average level.

Visual Display Units

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the total number of visual display units marketed in Britain in each of the past three years; and in each year, what percentage was also manufactured in Britain.

Mr. Forth: The information available is shown in the table:

Visual display units

£ million

	1986	*1987*	*[3]1988*
Manufacturers' sales[1]	388	339	253
Exports (fob)	56	72	50
Imports (cif)	189	225	227
United Kingdom market[2]	521	492	431
United Kingdom manufacturers' share of market per cent.	64	54	47

Source: DTI.

[1] The sales data refer primarily to units in the United Kingdom with a minimum employment of 50.

[2] United Kingdom market is defined as manufacturers' sales plus imports less exports.

[3] January to September.

North-East (Inward Investment)

Mr. Hague: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if there are any new developments in inward investment in the north-east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I am very pleased to say that Fujitsu, the Japanese electronics company, is today announcing that it will be setting up its first European semiconductor manufacturing plant at Newton Aycliffe, near Durham. My Department will be providing £30 million regional selective assistance for Fujitsu to become established in this development area.

The project will cost at least £400 million and will be one of the largest of its kind in Europe. It is expected to create more than 1,500 jobs by the end of 1994. The Fujitsu semiconductor plant will undertake full wafer fabrication, assembly and final test of dynamic random access memories for applications such as mainframe and personal computers and computerised equipment. The company will also be expanding its United Kingdom design capability as part of this investment. Both the United Kingdom and European industry will benefit from the increased access to the semiconductors that this project will provide.

National Engineering Laboratory (Pollution Research)

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on research being carried out by the national engineering laboratory into the elimination of pollution at source.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* I have been asked to reply.

Research at the national engineering laboratory addresses three major environmental concerns. These are the deterioration of the ozone layer, acid rain and the greenhouse effect.

NEL is able to do this because it is a major centre of research into heat transfer, the properties of fluids and flow measurement. Research into these areas is necessary to achieve the elimination of pollution at source. The work is concerned with acquiring the data, developing analysis and design techniques, and providing the specialist test facilities needed to optimise pollution-reduction strategies. Furthermore it is evident that much of this research is of value in enabling industrial processes to become inherently more efficient and less hazardous.

Ozone layer

NEL is determining the physical properties of replacements for chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). This data is essential in order that equipment, particularly refrigeration/air conditioning plant, operates as efficiently using these replacement fluids as current equipment using CFC refrigerant.

Acid rain

NEL research on internal combustion engines is expanding the understanding of processes occurring within an engine. This will enable stricter emission targets to be met by improvements in engine design rather than by installing cleaning devices in the exhaust system.

Greenhouse effect

Research at NEL is concerned with understanding and improving both heat transfer and combustion of gaseous fluids. Increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide from the burning of fuel is recognised as the major contributor to the greenhouse effect. A reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide can be achieved by improving the efficiency of the extraction and transfer of thermal energy.

NEL also manages the national wind turbine centre and has expertise in tidal power and water turbines.

Glass

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will publish in the form of a table *(a)* the

amount of glass recycled by each west European country in 1988 and *(b)* the amount of glass recycled as a percentage of the total amount of glass used for packaging for each country.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* Figures for the amount of glass recycled by each western European country in 1988 will not be available until June. The amount recycled in the United Kingdom increased to 275,000 tonnes, 16 per cent. of the total amount of glass used in packaging. Figures for the amounts recycled in 1987 in western Europe are recorded in the table.

	Amount recycled (thousand tonnes)	*Percentage of total amount of glass used for packaging*
Austria	85	44
Belgium	127	39
Denmark	35	32
France	646	26
West Germany	1,102	37
United Kingdom	233	13
Eire	7	8
Italy	580	38
Netherlands	320	62
Portugal	29	14
Spain	261	22
Switzerland	140	47
Turkey	34	27

Figures supplied by FEVE—the European Glass Containers Federation.

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much was paid by his Department under a single contract in 1986-87 in connection with the sale of certain British Shipbuilders' yards.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 13 March 1989 at column *100*. The information is commercially confidential. The amounts involved do not, however, add significantly to the total of privatisation expenses that I quoted on 13 March.

Beverage Containers Directive

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his Department's progress on implementing the requirements of the 1985 European Economic Community directive on beverage containers.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The United Kingdom programme for implementing this directive was submitted by the DTI in November 1987 following consultations with other Government Departments, local authority associations and 28 trade and industry organisations. It consisted of sub-programmes for containers made of glass, metals, plastics and paper composites and a cross-material submission on the soft drinks industry. Copies of the programme are available from the Libraries of both Houses.

The United Kingdom programme is based on voluntary agreements and in line with the Commission's assurance to the Government when the directive was adopted in June 1985, there is not discrimination between different types of container systems or between different types of packaging.

Good progress is being made in the recycling of beverage containers. There was agreement at a glass recycling commitment conference in July 1986 to double the number of bottle banks to 5,000 over the next five years, equivalent to one bottle bank per 10,000 people. Nationally we are on course to reach this target and the one per 10,000 figure has already been reached in the north of England. With more retailers agreeing to bottle banks being sited on their car parks, the amount of glass recycled is increasing rapidly and reached 275,000 tonnes in 1988.

The amount of metal recovered from cans is also increasing. "Save-a-Can" run by the can makers operates nearly 200 skips in England and Wales whilst the newly formed Aluminium Can Recycling Association hopes to have 100 recovery centres operating nationally by this summer. British Steel is encouraging local authorities to become involved in recovering steel cans from incinerated household waste and about 900 million cans a year are now being recovered this way.

A full progress report will be submitted by the Government to the Commission later this year, four years after the original programme was drawn up, and every subsequent four years thereafter.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to what have been the results of enlisting the assistance of managers of hotels used by homeless persons on establishing their residents' immigration status.

Mr. Renton: Under the Immigration (Hotel Records) Order, as amended, the keepers of hotels or similar establishments are required to keep a record of all persons aged 16 or over who stay at their premises. As part of their normal duties, the police may need to inspect these records in order to establish the immigration status of any of the residents of such an establishment. We have no plans to seek any special report on the operation of these arrangements.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants were detected, other than at airports and seaports, in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Renton: Information for 1988 on the numbers of illegal entrants detected and of persons dealt with under the deportation process is published in tables 13 and 14 of Home Office statistical bulletin 10/89 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. The great majority of persons dealt with under enforcement powers are identified after entry to the United Kingdom.

The information in these tables does not include persons refused entry to and removed from the United Kingdom at airports and seaports: information on such persons is published in table 1 of the annual volume "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom".

Fire Authorities

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each fire authority

(a) the date of first appointment of a brigade emergency planning officer and *(b)* the expenditure incurred on fire service civil defence activities and the amount of grant aid paid towards that expenditure for each year from 1979 to 1989.

Mr. John Patten: The dates of first appointments of brigade emergency planning staff officers are shown in the table.

Figures for the expenditure incurred by each fire authority on civil defence activities and the amount of grant aid paid towards that expenditure for each year since 1979 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Amounts for 1986-87, the last year for which all audited claims have been received, are in the second table.

		Employment		
Region	*Regional Fire Adviser*	*At time of appointment*	*Now*	*Date of appointment*
2.	T. F. Elton	CFO Tyne and Wear	CFO Tyne and Wear	November 1981
3.	P. H. Wilson	CFO Nottinghamshire	Retired	December 1981
	E. Patterson	CFO Nottinghamshire	CFO Nottinghamshire	February 1989
4.	R. C. Paramor	CFO Essex	CFO Essex	February 1979
5.	R. A. Bullers	CFO London	Retired	April 1981
	G. D. Clarkson	CFO london	CFO London	August 1987
6.	J. R. Pearson	CFO Hampshire	CFO Hampshire	September 1984
7.	J. Killoran	CFO Devon	Retired	April 1984
	N. Wallington	CFO Devon	CFO Devon	August 1987
8.	K. Hayton	CFO Clwyd	CFO Clwyd	April 1984
9.	B. L. Fuller	CFO West Midlands	CFO West Midlands	October 1981
10.	M. Killoran	CFO Greater Manchester	Retired	April 1981
	D. T. Davis	CFO Cheshire	CFO Cheshire	September 1986

		Expenditure claimed for grant aid in 1986-87	
Fire authority	*Date of first apppointment*	*Total expenditure reported*	*Grant aid paid*
Avon	27 October 1986	12,901	9,727
Bedfordshire	14 March 1988	—	—
Berkshire	13 March 1985	23,054	17,368
Buckinghamshire	22 January 1985	24,389	18,369
Cambridgeshire	21 February 1985	25,296	19,093
Cheshire	19 December 1984	43,982	32,986
Cleveland	23 September 1986	25,022	19,066
Clwyd	30 November 1984	54,158	40,619
Cornwall	21 October 1985	24,485	18,364
Cumbria	20 July 1984	31,495	23,866
Derbyshire	No appointment	—	—
Devon	10 December 1984	50,149	38,385
Dorset	24 March 1985	21,707	16,621
Durham	24 July 1985	28,559	21,488
Dyfed	4 April 1984	17,716	13,309
Essex	6 August 1984	69,333	58,810
Mid-Glamorgan	27 October 1987	—	—
South Glamorgan	No appointment	—	—
West Glamorgan	23 September 1986	15,456	11,643
Gloucestershire	15 May 1985	—	—
Gwent	14 April 1988	—	—
Gwynedd	6 November 1984	29,659	22,244
Hampshire	28 August 1984	55,299	42,069
Hereford and Worcester	18 December 1984	24,916	18,689
Hertfordshire	22 August 1985	18,783	14,221
Humberside	5 June 1985	27,106	20,601
Isle of Wight	18 December 1984	21,278	15,958
Kent	12 June 1984	26,229	19,990
Lancashire	14 March 1985	22,861	17,190
Leicestershire	13 December 1985	—	—
Lincolnshire	26 October 1984	22,551	16,913
London	9 July 1986	51,002	39,085
Greater Manchester	18 March 1985	—	—
Merseyside	Appointment under consideration	—	—
West Midlands	16 February 1987	28,030	21,265
Norfolk	25 September 1985	21,492	16,215
Northamptonshire	23 November 1984	25,444	19,122
Northumberland	25 November 1987	—	—
Nottinghamshire	21 June 1984	57,079	43,160
Oxfordshire	31 May 1985	22,451	17,338
Powys	15 August 1985	21,399	16,049
Shropshire	26 March 1985	—	—
Somerset	11 June 1984	29,033	21,842
Staffordshire	14 September 1984	20,462	15,346
Suffolk	12 March 1985	14,469	11,066
Surrey	15 May 1985	23,181	17,657
East Sussex	11 June 1984	—	—
West Sussex	4 September 1986	25,290	19,050
Tyne and Wear	14 August 1987	28,692	21,519
Warwickshire	21 January 1985	18,996	14,361
Wiltshire	4 September 1986	29,096	23,061
North Yorkshire	23 September 1986	15,876	11,907
South Yorkshire	No appointment	—	—
West Yorkshire	8 May 1986	27,001	21,301

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the dates of all regional fire advisers meetings since 1979; if he will give details of the topics discussed at such meetings; and what is the date of, and the topics to be covered at, the next regional fire advisers meeting.

Mr. John Patten: The dates of regional fire advisers' conferences since 1979 were as follows:

18 May 1979	27 October 1982
11 December 1979	27 January 1983
19 October 1981	13 April 1983
13 April 1982	13 October 1983
13 July 1982	12 January 1984

3 May 1984	24 November 1986
14 November 1984	28 April 1987
24 April 1985	20 October 1987
8 October 1985	26 April 1988
29 April 1986	18 October 1988

The next such conference is today, 12 April. These conferences cover a range of matters concerning civil defence planning and training. In addition, regional fire advisers attend various other meetings concerned with civil defence planning.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the name, present employment, date appointed and terms of reference of the regional fire adviser for each year from 1984 to 1989, *(b)* the name, present employment and date appointed of the staff officer to the regional fire adviser for each year from 1979 to 1989 and *(c)* the expenditure incurred by the regional fire adviser and his staff on civil defence duties and the amount of grant aid paid toward that expenditure for each year from 1979 to 1989, for each civil defence region.

Mr. John Patten: A list of regional fire advisers by region in England and Wales from 1984 to the present is given in the table.

There are no formal terms of reference but a regional fire adviser is responsible for the co-ordination of emergency fire service planning in his region. The appointment of his staff officer is a matter for each regional fire adviser. Expenditure incurred in connection with regional fire advisers' responsibilities is not grant-aided, but is directly reimbursed by the Home Office.

Figures for individual claims and those prior to 1984 could be calculated only at disproportionate cost but the total reimbursed expenditure since 1984 was:

	£
1984-85	7,206
1985-86	6,194
1986-87	7,170
1987-88	6,467
1988-89	5,169

		Employment		
Region	*Regional Fire Adviser*	*At time of appointment*	*Now*	*Date of appointment*
2.	T. F. Elton	CFO Tyne and Wear	CFO Tyne and Wear	November 1981
3.	P. H. Wilson	CFO Nottinghamshire	Retired	December 1981
	E. Patterson	CFO Nottinghamshire	CFO Nottinghamshire	February 1989
4.	R. C. Paramor	CFO Essex	CFO Essex	February 1979
5.	R. A. Bullers	CFO London	Retired	April 1981
	G. D. Clarkson	CFO London	CFO London	August 1987
6.	J. R. Pearson	CFO Hampshire	CFO Hampshire	September 1984
7.	J. Killoran	CFO Devon	Retired	April 1984
	N. Wallington	CFO Devon	CFO Devon	August 1987
8.	K. Hayton	CFO Clwyd	CFO Clwyd	April 1984
9.	B. L. Fuller	CFO West Midlands	CFO West Midlands	October 1981
10.	M. Killoran	CFO Greater Manchester	Retired	April 1981
	D. T. Davis	CFO Cheshire	CFO Cheshire	September 1986

Latchmere House

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the estimated additional annual net costs for the immigration and nationality department of moving immigration detainees from Latchmere house, Ham, to Haslar, Hampshire.

Mr. Renton: All aspects of the possible move, including costs, are being examined. The main additional cost for the immigration and nationality department would probably be some £60,000 a year for additional transport and escorts.

Data Protection

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will seek to amend the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act to make it an offence for a third party to require a data subject to seek subject access under the terms of the Data Protection Act to personal data held by the police in order to show that third party the data subject's criminal record; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 protects rehabilitated persons by providing that, unless a post is exempted from the provisions of the Act, an employer may not refuse an applicant employment on the grounds of a spent conviction.

Official Secrets Bill

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received any recent representations from the National Union of Journalists about the Official Secrets Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The most recent such representation which I received was sent in January.

Mental Illness (Prisoners)

Mr.Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the mental illness history of current occupants of Her Majesty's prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question by the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) on 8 December 1988 at column *283*.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is collected by his Department about *(a)* the medical and *(b)* the mental illness history of persons found guilty of crimes by the courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Information is not collected centrally about the medical history, physical or mental, of persons found guilty by the courts.

Woolwich (Court and Prison)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects construction of the new prison at Woolwich and the associated court complex to be completed; and when each is now planned to come into operation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The contract for construction of the prison is expected to be completed in December 1990. The target date for arrival of the first inmates is April 1991. The court complex is the responsibility of my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor. I understand that it is currently estimated that the court complex will be completed towards the end of 1991 and come into operation shortly thereafter.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest estimated cost of *(a)* the new prison at Woolwich and *(b)* the associated court complex; and what were the original estimates.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The original estimated cost for constructing the prison was £59·94 million (at second quarter 1986 prices). Associated advance works were estimated at an additional £4·08 million (at third quarter 1985 prices). The latest estimate for the project as a whole is £88·90 million, at 1988-89 prices. This is subject to adjustment, in the light of further cost increases in the construction industry.

The construction of the court complex is the responsibility of my right hon. and noble Friend, the Lord Chancellor. I understand that tenders for this project are being currently evaluated. The provisional pre-tender estimate at second quarter 1988 prices was about £17·5 million. This did not allow for any additional cost arising from the incorporation of the changes subsequently recommended by the Royal Fine Arts Commission.

Animal Experiments

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts are being made to discourage international and foreign regulatory bodies from requiring precise LD50 values.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Home Secretary is not responsible for the conditions under which LD50 tests are required: but I understand that the Departments concerned are making representations at EC, OECD and UN levels. In particular, the Department of Health is co-ordinating an international study on an alternative British approach to acute toxicity testing, which does not involve the generation of precise LD50 figures.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how effectively the project licensing system is being used to reduce and restrict performance of the classical LD50 test in Britain.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Applications to use animals for this purpose in this country are authorised only in strict accordance with the requirements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Before granting a licence, my right hon. Friend is required to consult an inspector appointed under the Act.

Football Grounds (Arrests)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to what crowd trouble occurred inside and outside the ground at the Littlewoods Cup Final on 9 April; how many people were arrested, distinguishing between those arrested by mounted officers and others; how many people have subsequently been charged; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that no significant crowd trouble occurred inside Wembley stadium, but that there were incidents of crowd trouble outside the ground, the most serious of which happened at approximately 3 pm and required the assistance of mounted officers in order to separate rival supporters. Mounted officers were involved in 26 of the 66 arrests made. Sixty five people were subsequently charged. Such incidents demonstrate that further action is necessary in respect of football hooliganism. The Government believe that the proposed national membership scheme will help to break the link between violence and football by excluding from grounds, and thereby deterring from travelling to matches, those who cause trouble.

Police Cells

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prisoners held in police cells at the end of each of the last six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: The information requested is as follows. The number of prisoners held in police cells continues downwards and the situation is better than it has been since the end of 1986.

Prisoners held in Police cells at unlocking on the last day of each month

	Number
1988	
October	1,531
November	1,025
December	87
1989	
January	349
February	219
March	71

Prison Escapes

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further measures have been taken

following his review of the circumstances which led to the escape by helicopter of two prisoners from Gartree prison in December 1987.

Mr. Hurd: In my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on 21 January 1988 at columns *785-86* I said that a vigorous review of security measures had been carried out immediately at all establishments holding category A prisoners, and that a number of practical measures were taken quickly.

I have now approved a number of other lines of action, including plans for the future shape of the dispersal system, and these are contained in a detailed statement of intention issued to the prison service by the deputy director general. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Diplomatic Passports

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether foreigners holding diplomatic passports, but not accredited in the United Kingdom, are exempt from normal entry procedures when visting this country.

Mr. Renton *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* Possession of a diplomatic passport does not, in itself, afford the holder any special status or entitlement.

Under the Immigration Act 1971, certain persons, including members of diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom who meet the requirements of section 8(3) of that Act as amended by the Immigration Act 1988, are entitled to exemption from immigration control. Members of the family forming part of the household of such members similarly benefit.

Certain members of diplomatic missions which are not based in the United Kingdom who are passing through this country while proceeding to take up or return to their posts, or who are returning to their own countries are, with their families, treated as being exempt from immigration control in order to meet the requirements of article 40 of the Vienna convention on diplomatic relations.

London Underground

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assistance his Department has given towards reducing crime on the London Underground; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The primary responsibility for reducing crime on the London Underground rests with the British Transport police and London Underground Ltd. The Home Office provides guidance and advice to BTP and LUL, as it does in this context to the Department of Transport. My right hon. Friend has approved arrangements under which Metropolitan police officers have been lent to help police the Underground while BTP recruit and train new officers to fill their increased establishment.

Rape

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken on the Women's National Commission's 1985 recommendation that the question of consent should be reconsidered with the aim of reforming the law on rape to make it clear that the alleged rapist's assumptions about the complainant's consent should be reasonable according to modern interpretations of women's rights to choose.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The law on rape provides that a man is not guilty if he believes that the woman was consenting to intercourse. Section 1(2) of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 1976 provides that any jury considering a defence based on consent should have regard to the presence of absence of reasonable grounds for such a belief. In R *v.* Pigg (1982), Lord Lane CJ also ruled that a man who was reckless as to whether the woman consented should also be held guilty. I am not persuaded that the recommendations of the Women's National Commission would improve the present law.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

El Salvador

15. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conduct and outcome of the recent election in El Salvador.

46. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied that the last presidential election in El Salvador was held under free and fair conditions.

54. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied that the recent presidential election in El Salvador was held under free and fair conditions.

Mr. Eggar: Her Majesty's Government's official observer, Dr. David Browning, attended the presidential elections in El Salvador. He is currently preparing his report, a copy of which will be deposited in the Library in due course.

40. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of the United States of America in relation to El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: We have regular discussions with the United States on a wide range of topics, including El Salvador.

51. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to visit El Salvador.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no present plans to visit El Salvador.

55. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet representatives of the new El Salvadorean Government.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans at present to meet representatives of the new Government of El Salvador.

Anglo-French Relations

16. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Anglo-French relations.

Mrs. Chalker: Anglo-French relations are excellent.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had useful talks with President Mitterrand at the Anglo-French summit meeting in Paris on 27 February. The two Governments consult closely on a wide range of issues. There are numerous ministerial and other contacts between the two countries.

Middle East

17. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet the Secretary of State of the United States of America to discuss the middle east.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend will be visiting Washington on 16-17 April and looks forward to discussing a wide range of issues, including the middle east, with Mr. Baker.

27. **Sir Dennis Walters:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards a middle east peace settlement.

Mr. Waldegrave: There have been a number of positive developments; the PLO's renunciation of terrorism; Israel's recognition that the status quo is untenable; the constructive attitude of the Soviet Union and the determination of the United States to work actively for a settlement. We continue to believe that an international conference remains the most suitable framework for negotiations between the parties.

Horn of Africa

18. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement about political developments in the Horn of Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: We remain in contact with the Governments of the Horn about the problems of the region, both bilaterally and with our partners in the Twelve. We are also in touch with other Governments. My right hon. and learned Friend discussed the Horn with Mr. Shevardnadze on 6 April and urged the Soviet Union to use its considerable influence in the area in a positive direction.

Prime Minister Bhutto

19. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to meet Prime Minister Bhutto of Pakistan.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend met Miss Bhutto on 27 March during his visit to Islamabad. She has accepted an invitation to visit Britain later this year. We look forward to her visit.

EC (Social Dimension)

20. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of state for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now make it his policy to support the social dimension in European Community affairs.

Mrs. Chalker: It has always been our policy to ensure, by avoiding unnecessary regulation, that the single market programme generates additional economic growth, and so more jobs.

31. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to calls among the United Kingdom European Community partners for greater emphasis on the social sphere in the run up to 1992.

Mrs. Chalker: We strongly support the single market programme, which, by reducing barriers to enterprise, will mean higher economic growth, and so more jobs.

Conventional Force Levels

21. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of recent negotiations on conventional force levels in Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: Two negotiations—one on conventional armed forces in Europe and one on confidence and security-building measures—began in Vienna on 6 March. The discussions have got off to a good businesslike start. My right hon. and learned Friend presented radical western proposals for both sets of talks on 6 March. We now look for a response from the east.

Mexican Foreign Minister

22. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his Mexican counterpart; and what was discussed.

Mr. Eggar: I met Mr. Solana in Caracas in January when we had a useful exchange of views on bilateral and international issues. I saw him again at the San Jose V conference in San Pedro Sula in February, and hope to continue our exchanges during my visit to Mexico later this month.

Northern Ireland

23. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the United States Government to help stem the flow of funds and weapons to terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government of the United States share our abhorrence of the activities of terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland. There is constant and continuing co-operation with them and this has significantly inhibited the flow of funds and arms into the Province. Our joint vigilance will not be relaxed as long as the terrorist threat remains.

Cyprus

24. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has recently had with the President of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend had a brief discussion with President Vassiliou on the telephone when he passed through London on 4 April, on his way to New York for his meeting with the United Nations Secretary-General and Mr. Denktash on 6 April. We welcome the agreement reached at that meeting to prepare a draft outline of an overall settlement by the end of May. We urge both sides to work constructively towards that end.

United States Government

25. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the new United States Administration concerning foreign policy matters in particular in the middle east; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend last met Mr. Baker in Vienna on 6 March. He looks forward to further discussions with him in Washington next week.

Hungarian Foreign Minister

26. **Mr. Michael Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Hungarian Foreign Minister; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend and I both had talks with the Hungarian Foreign Minister on Wednesday 15 March during his visit to the United Kingdom. We had a useful discussion on bilateral matters, including trade, and on international issues. We also discussed developments in the internal situation in Hungary.

Third World Debt

28. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with other Foreign Affairs Ministers regarding Third world debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the written reply I gave him on 8 February at column *739*.

Tibet

29. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of China concerning recent events in Tibet.

30. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed Tibet with a representative of the Chinese Government.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend discussed Tibet when he met the Chinese Foreign Minister in Tokyo in February. My noble Friend the Minister of State also discussed Tibet with Mr. Zhou Nan, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister during the latter's visit in March.

32. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the subject of human rights in Tibet.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 March to the late hon. Member for Glasgow, Central, Mr. McTaggart, at column *728*.

Israeli Foreign Minister

34. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Israeli Foreign Minister of State; and what matters will be discussed.

41. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his counterpart in the Israeli Government; and what matters will be discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. and learned Friend hopes to visit Israel later this year, and looks forward to discussing bilateral and regional issues with Professor Arens then.

Angola

35. **Mr. Neil Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any representations about the economic prospects for Angola.

Mrs. Chalker: No.

South American Debt

36. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the light of recent events in Venezuela, what new initiatives he is planning to help south American democracies with their debt problems.

Mrs. Chalker: At the recent spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank in Washington, Finance Ministers of the leading industrialised countries, including the United Kingdom, agreed that the key principles of the case-by-case growth-oriented debt strategy remain valid. They encouraged the IMF and World Bank to take appropriate steps to support efforts to reduce the debt burdens of countries which are committed to substantial economic reforms, while emphasising that concrete negotiations are a matter for the debtor countries and the commercial bank.

EFTA and Eastern Bloc Countries (EC Links)

37. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what encouragement he will give to member countries of EFTA and Eastern bloc countries to forge closer links with the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: We welcomed the agreement of EC and EFTA Ministers meeting in Brussels on 20 March, to consider jointly the promotion of closer and more extensive EC/EFTA co-operation. We also supported the establishment last year of official EC relations with all Eastern European countries except Romania, and are in favour of the trade or trade and co-operation agreements currently concluded or under negotiation with these countries.

EC (Fraud)

38. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent proposals he has made to combat fraud in the European Community.

Mr. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to the anti-fraud proposals endorsed by the Economic and Finance Council on 13 March and reported by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) on 15 March at

column *245*. Those measures were based on suggestions put forward by the United Kingdom in the run-up to the Council.

Pakistan

39. **Mr. Hanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement concerning relations between Britain and Pakistan.

Mr. Eggar: Britain and Pakistan enjoy a warm and friendly relationship based on strong historical ties. These have been reinforced by the restoration of democracy in Pakistan. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State paid a useful visit to Islamabad from 27 to 28 March. We look forward to welcoming Prime Minister Bhutto to Britain later this year.

Portugal

42. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations with Portugal.

Mrs. Chalker: Our relations with Portugal are excellent. Portugal is our oldest ally, and we work closely together within NATO and the European Community. We are delighted that Portugal has also acceded to the WEU and that this took place under the British presidency.

South-West Africa

43. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to make representations to the South African Government on its policy towards South-West Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister discussed Namibia when she met the South African Foreign Minister in Windhoek on 1 April. Subsequently we have been in daily, often hourly, contact with the South African Government in support of the United Nation's efforts to restore peace to Namibia.

South Africa (Political Detainees)

44. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of the Republic of South Africa for the release of political detainees.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made frequent high level representations on behalf of those detained without charge in South Africa. We believe all those so detained should be charged or released unconditionally.

Official Information

45. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in achieving better targeting and improved dissemination of official information to overseas media.

Mr. Eggar: Our posts abroad are required regularly to report back on the impact of official information on the overseas media, in particular through a full annual return which reviews output against objectives. We are refining posts' annual information reporting procedures to give greater emphasis to the definition of targets and objectives.

The performance of suppliers is also monitored to ensure that services provided and resources used support FCO information objectives.

Central America

47. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with the countries of central America.

Mr. Eggar: We have normal diplomatic relations with all the countries of central America. Our policy towards the region is based on support for democracy and respect for human rights and the need for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of regional conflicts. We have therefore consistently supported the efforts of the central American states to resolve their problems within the framework of the Esquipulas II peace process.

Spain

48. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with Spain.

Mrs. Chalker: We enjoy excellent relations with Spain, which is a valued partner and ally in the European Community, NATO and the Western European Union. The importance and strength of our relations was well demonstrated by the visits to Spain by Her Majesty the Queen and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last autumn.

Drug Trafficking

49. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent steps have been taken to help counteract international drug trafficking.

Mr. Eggar: A United Nations convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances was adopted in December 1988. The United Kingdom has signed subject to ratification. We have also signed bilateral asset seizure agreements with five countries, the most recent with Switzerland on 8 March. Similar arrangements have also been concluded with Bermuda.

Mr. Jacques Delors

50. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met M. Jacques Delors to discuss developments within the European Community; and what specific matters were discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend and I last met M. Delors at the meeting of the Council of Ministers on 20 March. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of 22 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) at column *623-24*.

Southern Africa

52. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed southern African affairs with the South African ambassador; and what specific matters were discussed.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State last met the South African ambassador during the visit of the South African Foreign Minister, Mr. Pik Botha, on 15 March. They discussed a wide range of issues.

Hong Kong

53. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to visit Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has at present no plans to visit Hong Kong.

58. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently received concerning the future of Hong Kong.

Mr. Eggar: We regularly receive representations from organisations and individual members of the public, both in this country and in Hong Kong, about a wide range of issues connected with the future of Hong Kong. We are also in close contact with the Hong Kong Government, who have their own channels for consultation and monitoring of public opinion in Hong Kong.

East Timor

56. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on human rights in East Timor.

Mr. Eggar: We believe that respect for human rights in East Timor has significantly improved in recent years.

Turkey

57. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on United Kingdom relations with Turkey.

Mrs. Chalker: I cannot add to the answer I gave on this subject to my hon. Friend on 8 March at column *556*.

Council of Ministers

59. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues he will raise at the next meeting of the Council of Ministers.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 23 March to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and

Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) at columns *728-29*.

Zimbabwe

60. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Zimbabwe following the Prime Minister's recent visit.

Mrs. Chalker: We enjoy excellent relations with Zimbabwe. This was clearly evident during the Prime Minister's recent, highly successful visit.

Gulf States

61. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the current state of relations with the Gulf states.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our relations with the Arab states of the Gulf are, without exception, excellent.

Syria (Terrorism)

62. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, during his meetings with Soviet leaders last week, the continuation of Syrian involvement in international terrorism was discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. And as at previous meetings we encouraged the soviet authorities to support our firm line.

Turkey (Human Rights)

14. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last made representations to the Turkish Government regarding human rights abuse in Turkey.

Mrs. Chalker: I last raised the matter of human rights in Turkey with the Turkish ambassador on 2 February. He readily accepted the need for Turkey to abide by the terms and conditions of the human rights conventions to which Turkey is a party, and reaffirmed the determination of his Government to secure further improvements in the respect for human rights in Turkey.

Pakistan (Afghan Refugees)

33. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to help relieve the Afghan refugee problem in Pakistan.

Mr. Eggar: Refugees in Pakistan benefit from British humanitarian aid to the Afghans through international and non-governmental organisations. This totalled £10·5 million last year. We have so far announced a contribution of £2 million this year and are ready to provide further assistance as the need is established.

USSR (Human Rights)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Soviet Foreign Minister on the question of human rights.

Mr. Waldegrave: Human rights questions are a part of the regular agenda for our discussions with the Soviet authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State made our views clear when he met Mr. Shevardnadze last week. A list of cases of public concern was handed over.

NATO

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Secretary General of NATO; and what issues he discussed with him.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Secretary General of NATO and my right hon. and learned Friend both participated in the ministerial meeting of the North Atlantic Council, held in Brussels on 8-9 December, at which a full range of Alliance security and arms control issues was discussed.

Brazil

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for Ministers in his Department to visit Brazil.

Mr. Eggar: There are no immediate plans for any Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers to visit Brazil. I visited Brazil in November 1988, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary visited in July 1985.

Israel

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to hold further discussions with the Israeli authorities on middle east peace problems following the recent visit by the Minister of State.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes. The next move will be the visit of Mr. Shamir next month. We shall continue to play our full part in efforts to prepare for negotiations. We have an active dialogue with all the parties.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Strychnine

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by year since 1979 for each of the three counties of Yorkshire the number of cases of abuse of pesticides involving strychnine; and if he will identify the domestic farm and wild animal species involved.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number of incidents*	*Animals involved*	*County*
1979	Nil	—	—
1980	1	1 dog	North Yorkshire
1981	1	1 dog	South Yorkshire
	2	1 dog, 1 cat	North Yorkshire
1982	1	1 dog	South Yorkshire
	1	1 dog	North Yorkshire
1983	2	2 dogs, 1 cat	North Yorkshire
1984	4	4 dogs	North Yorkshire
1985	1	1 fox	North Yorkshire
1986	1	1 dog	North Yorkshire
1987	1	1 dog	South Yorkshire

Year	Number of incidents	Animals involved	County
1988	1	1 woodpigeon	North Yorkshire
1989	Nil	—	—

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions during each of the last three years he has initiated action following illegal use of strychnine-based pesticides.

Mr. Ryder: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1986	10
1987	7
1988	8

White Willow Watermark Disease

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is undertaking on White Willow Watermark disease and its impact upon cricket bat manufacture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: Research into the watermark disease of cricket bat willow is being carried out at the university of East Anglia and the Forestry Commission has provided some of the funding for this. It is not, however, undertaking any additional in-house research into the disease.

Meetings held recently between growers of willow and the cricket bat manufacturers, which have been attended by a representative from the Forestry Commission, seem likely to result in a voluntary levy being applied to the clefts from which the bats are made. This will enable further research to be carried out.

There has been a significant reduction in the number of diseased trees found in Britain over the last 15 years, largely because of control measures carried out under the Watermark Disease (Local Authorities) Order 1986 and its predecessors.

Forestry Commission (Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the names, locations and purchase dates of blocks of land of areas greater than 100 hectares in the three counties of Yorkshire, which were newly planted by the Forestry Commission in 1987-88.

Mr. Ryder: I have been asked to reply.
There were none.

Potatoes

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to how many European Economic Community countries impose quantitative restrictions upon the level of potato production.

Mr. Ryder: The United Kingdom is the only member state to impose quantitative restrictions. These are operated by the Potato Marketing Board, which controls production in Great Britain by regulating plantings under a quota system.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies have been made of the impact of the intervention policies of the Potato Marketing Board upon *(a)* the prices paid by the consumer and *(b)* profitability for growers.

Mr. Ryder: I am not aware of any studies on these specific points, but I refer my hon. Friend to two more general studies: "Potatoes in Surplus" by L. Hinton (Occasional Paper No. 37, Department of Land Economy, Cambridge University, 1987) and "An Econometric Model of the Maincrop Potato Market in Great Britain", by C. Ennew and B. White (Report No. 1/88, Department of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.).

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of imports of potato products during each of the past five years.

Mr. Ryder: The following tonnages of potato products were imported into the United Kingdom:

Crop year (June/May)	'000 tonnes
1983-84	411
1984-85	369
1985-86	348
1986-87	377
1987-88	430

Source: Customs and Excise Overseas Trade Statistics.

Organic Farming

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has made any financial appraisal of organic farming vis-á-vis existing production systems.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* No, but I am considering whether and how best to obtain the information required for such appraisals.

TRANSPORT

M40

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the M40 from west London to Oxford was available for use along its complete length for the first time.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: On 28 March 1974.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of the M40 are concrete and how many miles tarmac.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The answer is:

	Miles
Concrete	15·3
Tarmac	13·8

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total cost of repair and maintenance of (a) the tarmac sections and *(b)* the concrete sections of the M40 since the motorway was first opened for use.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The answer is:

	£
Tarmac	1,888,000
Concrete	3,629,000

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, since the M40 was first opened for use, how many months have been taken up with one or more lanes on the concrete sections closed for repairs.

British Transport Police

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many British Transport police have been in post in each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: BTP figures for officers in post are as follows:

End years	*Total*
1979	1,899
1980	1,948
1981	2,138
1982	2,128
1983	2,052
1984	1,961
1985	1,817
1986	1,834
1987	1,846
1988	1,830
[1]1989	1,820

[1] At 31 March 1989.

The change in the total between 1984 and 1985 reflected the termination of arrangements between Associated British Ports and the BTP.

Road Standards

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assumptions are made about minimum road standards serving conurbations of more than 25,000 inhabitants.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is Government policy that communities with more than 100,000 inhabitants should have easy access although not necessarily direct connection to a trunk road. The justification for trunk road schemes is based on a comprehensive appraisal of costs and benefits. Selection of the appropriate carriageway standards forms a part of the process.

London Underground (Fires)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what instructions are given to drivers on underground trains in the event of a fire occuring in the middle of the train with particular regard to helping passengers *(a)* between the driver and the fire and *(b)* between the fire and the end of the train; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Every effort is made to design underground rolling stock so that the risk of fire breaking out is minimised—or, if fire does occur, that it will not disable the train. In the event of a fire the driver's first responsibility is to get the train to the nearest station and inform the line controller by radio. No passenger has been injured by a fire on a train within the period 1984 to date. I understand from London Underground Ltd. that a programme to remove inflammable material from rolling stock has begun.

London Underground (Heart Attacks)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities are available on the London Underground in the event of an individual suffering a heart attack on a train; and what instructions are given to staff on whether or not to move the sufferer.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that stretchers and first aid kits are available on the Underground but that staff are instructed to summon expert medical assistance in the event of someone being taken seriously ill. Staff are advised not to move any passenger suspected of suffering a heart attack.

Central Line (Communications)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration has been given to the age and adequacy of current radio communications between drivers and guards on Central line underground trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Communication between driver and guard on the Central line is by "Loudaphone". This is a microphone and loudspeaker system, operated by a push button, which is built into trains. The railway inspectorate is investigating reports of poor quality voice transmissions. As an added safety measure, the driver is also in radio communication with the line controller.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the increase in the numbers of heavy goods vehicles taxed of the 38 tonne limit, expressed both numerically and as a percentage, as at year end 1988 compared with 1987; and how he measures the objective of reducing the numbers of heavy lorries in the light of these figures.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The stock of 38 tonne goods vehicles increased by 9,900 (24 per cent.) between the end of 1987 and the end of 1988. It is estimated that the introduction of 38-tonne vehicles since 1983 has led to a saving of about 9,000 other heavy goods vehicles that would have been required to cope with the current level of haulage activity. This saving is estimated by assuming that a 38 tonne vehicle has a 20 per cent. greater payload, by weight, than a 32·5 tonne vehicle, that in other respects, eg journey length, load factors, etc. the vehicles operate in the same way, and that no new traffic is generated by 38-tonners.

Motor Car Statistics

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he possesses concerning the numbers of motor cars registered in Great Britain in the years 1959, 1969, 1979, and 1989, respectively, together with the estimated cumulative motor car miles run in each year and his projections of both figures for the year 2000 and beyond.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The available information is as follows:

Year	Cars[1] currently licensed: (million)	Vehicle kilometres (miles) Cars[3] and taxis: (billion)
1959	5·2	54·7 (34·0)
1969	11·0	132·0 (82·0)
1979	14·5	184·9 (114·9)
1988	18·9	270·4 (168·0)
Forecasts[2]		
2000	21·1—22·7	294—335 (183—208)
2005	22·0—23·9	304—356 (189—221)
2010	22·7—25·0	315—377 (196—234)
2015	23·4—26·1	325—395 (202—245)

[1]Figures are for vehicles with a car body type. Figures for years before 1988 are not available on this basis and estimates have been made from the number of cars taxed as private in those years.
[2]Upper and lower forecasts are taken from the assumptions for car ownership used in the national road traffic forecasts.
[3]The definition of cars is slightly broader than that used for cars currently licensed.

The forecasts of car ownership and vehicle mileage are based on the national road traffic forecasts of 1984. It is expected that revised forecasts will be issued shortly.

Transport Planning (Greater London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what statutory powers were possessed by the former Greater London council in respect of transport planning in Greater London which are not now possessed by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Greater London council had a duty under section 2 of the Transport (London) Act 1969 to prepare transport plans for Greater London. This duty was revoked by the London Regional Transport Act 1984 which established London Regional Transport and charged it with the duty of planning and providing passenger transport services for Greater London.

The highways and traffic powers of the council in respect of roads in London were reallocated to the London boroughs under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1985, apart from 70 miles of former metropolitan roads which were transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under the Metropolitan Roads Trunking Order 1986. At the request of the London boroughs, he is also responsible for the control, management, development and extension of London's traffic signals and urban traffic control system.

Normans Heath (Bypass)

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to announce his decision about a bypass scheme on the A41 at Normans Heath.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is among the many candidates nationally for possible inclusion in the trunk road programme following the current review. We hope to make an announcement later this spring.

Motorways (Noise Barriers)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on the provision of noise barriers alongside motorways close to a new housing development.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: When a motorway is built near to houses, the Department provides barriers in circumstances where these are cost-effective and cheaper and more effective than providing secondary glazing under the Noise Insulation Regulations.

We will also, in appropriate cases, agree to a developer siting a noise barrier on motorway land, subject to our being satisfied on details and the developer bearing the cost.

Any proposal for a barrier alongside a motorway, but on other land, is a matter for decision by the local planning authority, which may consult the Department about its effects on the highway.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the current position of the east London river crossing, indicating when he expects to announce the revised design of the new bridge and when he now expects construction to begin.

Mr. Channon: Further progress with the scheme is dependent on the outcome of the review of the River Thames bridge design being undertaken by consultants. I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 23 March at columns *708-9* for the current position on that study.

Airport Security

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration his Department has given to the report entitled "Airport Security: the Experience of Manchester Airport", a copy of which has been sent to him; what action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We received a copy of the report from the hon. Member on 7 April. It has been read with interest. The report was prepared by the TGWU branch at Manchester airport. The Union's representative on the National Aviation Security Committee (NASC) will be asked whether the union as a whole endorses the recommendations made by its Manchester branch, and if so whether, as a result, it intends to put forward proposals for consideration by the National Aviation Security Committee.

Automatic Ticket Barriers (London Underground)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the safety implications of installing automatic ticket barriers on the London Underground; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: In addition to three early-day motions, about 30 representations have been received from members of Parliament and members of the public since 1 January.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning the failure rate of those automatic ticket barriers which have been installed on the London Underground; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I understand from London Underground Ltd. that, on average, gates fail once for every 79,000 passengers using them. This represents approximately 16 single gate failures per day, each of which takes between 10 and 15 minutes for a fitter to rectify.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he is aware of any circumstances in which, in the event of a power failure, any of the new automatic ticket gates in London Underground stations would remain closed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if London Underground Ltd. has informed him of any occasion on which difficulties occurring in the new automatic ticket gates at King's Cross station on the day of their official inauguration, 27 February, which would lead him to reconsider his assurances that in the event of a power failure, all the gates would open automatically;

(3) if London Underground Ltd has informed him of any occasion on which an actual or simulated power failure has resulted in any of the new automatic ticket gates in London Underground stations remaining closed.

Mr. Portillo: As I told the hon. Lady in my letter of 4 April 1989, London Underground Ltd. (LUL) told me recently that in certain most unlikely circumstances failure of a single phase in the power supply would mean that not all the ticket gates would open automatically. It has assured me that, should such a failure occur, staff have been instructed to open all gates immediately by using the emergency opening arrangements which are unaffected by single-phase power failures. LUL is rectifying this problem by a programme of modification which will be complete within three months.

I can add that the problem was first identified at King's Cross.

Explosives (Carriage by Road)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the planned new regulations for Conveyance of Explosives by Road Regulations will *(a)* restrict traffic movements during severe weather or during periods of peak traffic, *(b)* introduce new standards to strengthen gas-carrying vehicles to withstand roll-over accidents, *(c)* insist on third party insurance that will be adequate to cover accidents such as the one at the Los Alfaques campsite, San Carlos, Spain, *(d)* impose new requirements for advance warning of planned journeys and routes to emergency services and *(e)* require escorts for vehicles paid by commercial companies.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The Road Traffic (Carriage of Explosives) Regulations laid before Parliament cover the transport of substances and articles classified as "explosives" only. The flammable gases are not covered. The regulations do not cover the matter of insurance.

The regulations require that where more than 5 tonnes of particular explosives are carried on a vehicle, the route must be agreed with the appropriate chief officer of police. An approved code of practice which gives practical guidance on methods of compliance accompanies the regulations. Vehicle operators undertaking journeys involving explosives should take care in selecting routes, and consider security, roadworks, congestion and weather. Routes through built-up areas should not be used except when necessary to make a delivery. A two-man crew is required on the vehicle. A separate escort vehicle is not.

Hazardous Cargoes

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department is monitoring the incidence with which containers of hazardous goods are lashed to the decks of cargo vessels when the hold is full; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The Department does not monitor the incidence with which cargoes are carried on the decks of cargo vessels, but in the course of their inspections marine surveyors in the Department may check that deck cargoes have been lashed and stowed correctly.

Perishable Goods

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the enforcement of standards within road haulage vehicles used for the conveyance of perishable goods.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

The carriage of all foodstuffs within the United Kingdom is subject to the requirements of the Food Hygiene (Markets, Stalls and Delivery Vehicles) Regulations, 1966, as amended. Responsibility for the enforcement of these regulations rests entirely with local authorities. Wider application of the storage temperature controls in these regulations is currently being considered and revised draft regulations will be issued for consultation shortly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will deposit in the Library the results of BMP Davidson Pearce's market research on attitudes to family credit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are arranging with the Central Office of Information for a copy of the results of the research, and some other background material relating to the family credit advertising campaign, to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many family credit claimants are also in receipt of housing benefit; how much of each £1 gained in family credit by these claimants is lost in housing benefit; and what effects he estimates this will have on the propensity of low income families to claim family credit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on the number of family credit recipients who also get housing benefit is not available.

Up to the point that housing benefit is extinguished, rate rebate recipients will lose 20p housing benefit for each £1 gained in family credit. Similarly, rent allowance and rebate recipients would lose 65p for each £1 gained in family credit.

Some families may not realise that, although their housing benefit might change, they will nevertheless be better off overall if they qualify for family credit. This is one of the points which our forthcoming advertising campaign will address.

Chief Adjudication Officer (Annual Report)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the Chief

Adjudication Officer's annual report for 1987-88 in respect of his comments on supplementary benefit claims, urgent need payments, sickness benefits and industrial disablement benefit.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The chief adjudication officer's annual report for 1987-88 makes it clear that there were certain areas of the supplementary benefit scheme which were complicated to administer and to understand. The advent of income support in April 1988 has resulted in a simplification of the benefit system. Furthermore under income support the urgent cases provisions referred to are no longer present. A direct result of the changes is that the chief adjudication officer has noted that he finds that the overall level of performance on income support is encouraging.

The chief adjudication officer's report also identified that there is still room for improvement in the standard of adjudication on sickness benefit and disablement benefit. Further guidance will be issued where it is considered appropriate.

Industrial Injuries and Diseases

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will widen the definition of industrial diseases, for the purposes of pneumoconiosis and workers' compensation legislation, so as to include associated lung diseases such as chronic bronchitis where there is evidence that such a condition exists in a person who has evidence of any dust whatsoever on his lungs.

Mr. Scott: We are advised on the list of prescribed industrial diseases by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council. Its report on bronchitis and emphysema published in May last year (Cm. 379) concluded that it is at present impossible to distinguish airflow limitation caused by dust from that due to other causes such as smoking (the most common cause of bronchitis and emphysema) and that the available evidence is that the scale of the effects of dust is in any case relatively small. It did not recommend any extension of the current prescribed industrial diseases provisions, and we agree with that view.

Pensions

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the percentage of gross domestic product devoted to pensioners; and what is the percentage in other countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest information available indicates that in 1983 spending on the elderly in the United Kingdom was third highest in the European Community as a share of GDP (9·6 per cent.), just behind Denmark and France. Partial figures for 1984 show increased spending in the United Kingdom, while spending in other states has decreased.

Income Support

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in the Doncaster and Mexborough area of South Yorkshire, currently placed in board and lodging accommodation by local authorities and entitled to income support, will *(a)* have to make a second, separate, claim for living expenses from the local Department of Social Security offices and *(b)* have to claim money for their housing costs from local authority housing benefits sections after April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Claimants in this group already receiving income support will not have to make a new claim for income support in April. Local offices are sending them the necessary forms to claim housing benefit from April. The number placed in board and lodging accommodation by local authorities is not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people who have been in local authority care during the previous two years in Doncaster and Mexborough have lost entitlement to income support.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that the information is not available.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those on income support will receive *(a)* a partial increase and *(b)* no increase at all in their incomes because of being in receipt of transitional protection and in the current year (i) for the United Kingdom as a whole and (ii) for the social security area covering Nottingham.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that the information is not available. The estimated number of income support claimants in Great Britain who will benefit from a partial increase at this year's up-rating is 610,000. An estimated 600,000 will remain at the same level of benefit. No estimates are available on a regional or local basis.

Information for Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Training (Refusals)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people in Doncaster and Mexborough in the county of Yorkshire have been referred to an adjudication officer for consideration of refusal of approved training during the last 12 months.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: During the 12 months ended 31 March 1989, a total of 106 claims for benefit have been referred to the adjudication office covering the Doncaster and Mexborough area for consideration of the question of refusal of approved training. Thirty two of the references were decided in the claimant's favour and 74 against. These figures, which are based on a 100 per cent. count of adjudication officer decisions, refer to the number of claims rather than to the number of individuals claiming. Some individuals may have had more than one claim referred for adjudication.

Staff Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the present number of staff at his Department's offices at Irene house, Tooting; Arndale house, Wandsworth, and Crown house, Streatham; and what was the number of vacancies at each of these offices on 31 March.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

	Complement 1988-89	*Staff in post 31 March 1989*
Irene house, Tooting	121	118·5
Arndale house, Wandsworth	172	179·0
Crown house, Streatham	120	121·5

Community Care

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide figures for the Walthamstow, Leytonstone and Woodgrange Park offices of his Department for the year ended 31 March of *(a)* their social fund amounts allocated sub-divided between community care grants and loans, *(b)* the amounts paid out, similarly sub-divided, *(c)* the amount which was paid out by each office in the previous year and *(d)* their allocation for the forthcoming year, similarly sub-divided.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about local office budgetallocations is available in the Library.

Information about the numbers of social fund applications processed and amounts paid is available in the Library for the period April 1988 to February 1989. Information for March 1989 will be placed in the Library later this month.

Information about local office expenditure on single payments for the period 1987-88 is also available in the Library.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what additional publicity his Department is giving to the availability of community care grants, following the low initial take-up of such grants.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Local office managers have been asked to improve and maintain liaison with local statutory and voluntary organisations since these are often best placed to identify people who may be eligible for help. We also intend to produce additional information material on the social fund aimed at potential applicants. This will supplement the information already available in leaflet SB16 "A Guide to the Social Fund" as well as a variety of other leaflets and forms.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the percentage of take-up of community care grants from the social fund.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Take-up of community care grants has continued to rise steadily. In February 1989, 42,000 applications were received compared with 24,000 in August 1988. Expenditure over the same period rose from £2 million to just over £6 million, representing 110 per cent. of anticipated monthly expenditure. Total expenditure to the end of February was £34·1 million.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had with local authority associations and voluntary organisations on the implementation of sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We agreed with the local authority associations last year that sections 1, 2 and 3 should be implemented together, and that detailed work on these should follow the conclusion of discussions on the implementation of section 7. Work on section 7 is still under way.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to introduce legislation to reform the system of disability benefits.

Mr. Scott: We need to wait until all the reports have been published on the OPCS surveys of disability, and their findings considered, before deciding whether and when to introduce legislation to reform disability benefits.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to introduce a partial incapacity benefit following the publication of all Office of Population Censuses and Surveys surveys on disability.

Mr. Scott: We shall look at the need for a partial incapacity benefit when we examine existing benefit provision against the findings of the OPCS surveys.

Grants and Loans

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications were received in each month since 11 April 1988 for *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans in (i) Greenock and Port Glasgow, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Details of the numbers of social fund applications received are not recorded. However, information on the numbers of applications for social fund loans and grants processed and awarded, listed by local office, including information on budget allocations and expenditure, may be obtained from the details held in the Library.

Social Fund (Staff Ratios)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the staff-to-claimant ratios for social fund departments in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is not available in the format requested. Details of the staff days spent on social fund activity are, however, recorded monthly. The information available to 28 February 1989 is given in the table.

	February 1989	
	Staff days spent on social fund	*Income support load*
Scotland	10,839	512,671
Strathclyde	6,884	276,125
Greenock	211	11,394
Port Glasgow	147	4,890

Young Persons (Benefits)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many 16 and 17-year-olds in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole have lost benefits since September 1988 because they are unemployed or have been unable to take advantage of guaranteed YTS places; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The guaranteed offer of a YTS place to all 16 and 17-year-olds not in full-time education or employment means that there is now no need for young people to be unemployed. We are satisfied that the training agency has more than sufficient YTS places available in Greenock and Port Glasgow, Strathclyde, and in Scotland as a whole.

Disability (Survey)

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the third report by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on disability in Great Britain will be published.

Mr. Scott: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) has today published the third report on the findings of the surveys of disability in Great Britain carried out between 1985 and 1988. The report covers the prevalence of disability among children. It is the third of six reports on the surveys' findings which will be published by the OPCS over the next three months.

The report provides prevalence estimates from the OPCS surveys of disabled children under 16 in private households and communal establishments. OPCS estimates that 360,000 children in Great Britain have disabilities. Five thousand six hundred of the children live in communal establishments, the remainder in private households.

We will welcome comments on this and the further OPCS reports as they are published.

ENVIRONMENT

Trichlorophenols

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has to prevent the contamination of water supplies with trichlorophenols.

Mr. Moynihan: It is currently the responsibility of the water authorities to take steps to prevent drinking water sources becoming contaminated with phenolic compounds which can be transformed by the chlorination process into trichlorophenol. The Water Bill will transfer this function to the National Rivers Authority and will provide strengthened powers of pollution control.

Catalytic Converters

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any representations concerning the fitting of catalytic converters to all new vehicles in order to reduce air pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 April 1989]:* We have received a number of representations on the matter of catalysts to reduce motor vehicle pollution. The so-called Luxembourg package of vehicle exhaust emission standards was adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 1987 and last year we played a major role in the achievement of a common position on tighter standards for small cars. The common position now awaits further consideration by the European Parliament under the co-operation procedure. The directives specify the tightest standards that may be applied by Member states and, subject to confirmation of the common position on small cars, we have decided to apply them all in the United Kingdom. We expect them to result in almost all cars in the United Kingdom requiring catalysts and to lead to a substantial improvement in air quality. It will, however, be possible for cars of less than 2 litres to meet these standards with lean-burn engines coupled with simple and robust oxidation catalysts. Lean-burn engines offer the prospect of significant fuel savings.

Sewage Outfalls

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by location, the sewage outfalls to the sea in *(a)* the Yorkshire water authority and *(b)* the Severn-Trent water authority; and of these, if he will show in his answer (i) those that are primary treatment works and (ii) those that are long outfall.

Mr. Moynihan: The Yorkshire water authority currently has the following outfalls which discharge direct to the North Sea:

Scarborough (Northern, Southern, Wheatcroft)
Bridlington
Filey (Brigg)
Whitby
Hornsea
Scalby (Scarborough)
Staithes
Robin Hood's Bay
Runswick Bay
Sandsend
Ravenscar
Withernsea

At Withernsea, sewage currently receives primary treatment before discharge. There are long sea outfalls at Bridlington and Hornsea and a new long sea outfall is under construction at Scarborough to replace the existing outfalls. There are new sewage outfalls to the sea in the Severn-Trent water authority area.

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions have taken place as to the feasibility of introducing an employee share ownership scheme in any future privatisation that his Department may sponsor.

Mr. Ridley: In his reply on 15 March to a written question by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), at column *238*, my hon. and learned Friend the Minister for Water and Planning announced that there will be special share offer arrangements for the employees of the new water plcs when the present water authorities are floated later this year. Discussions are in progress between my Department and the Water Authorities Association on the establishment of share schemes, approved by the Inland Revenue, as part of those share arrangements.

In his statement to the House on 3 February 1988 at column *983* my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) made it clear that in evaluating private sector bids for the Crown Suppliers he would pay particular attention to proposals for the involvement of the staff in the success of the enterprise.

Housing Associations

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the differences in standards of construction between dwellings constructed and completed wholly by the housing association grant system and those either planned or completed through mixed housing association grant and private finance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: To receive housing association grant from the Housing Corporation all schemes must meet appropriate standards of construction and provide accommodation appropriate for the intended use. The same design and contracting requirements are specified by the Housing Corporation, irrespective of whether the schemes are financed wholly by public funds or by a mixture of HAG and loans from the private sector.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent section 11(7) of the proposed Community Charges (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations allows a community charge registration officer to provide the police, immigration authorities and the Inland Revenue with a copy of the publicly available extract of the register.

Mr. Gummer: Not to any extent whatsoever.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what timetable for implementation of the Community Charge (Administration and Enforcement) Regulations 1989, (S.I., 1989, No. 438) his Department is working to.

Mr. Gummer: The operative dates of the regulations are set out at the beginning of the statutory instrument. The regulations are all now in force except for regulations 4 and 5, which will come into effect on 22 May. These two regulations will enable registration officers to require information from individuals for the purpose of compiling their registers.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether young people over the age of 18 years who are either *(a)* studying on a discretionary grant or *(b)* on employment training or a similar scheme will have their income adjusted to take account of their obligation to pay the community charge from April 1989 in Scotland and from April 1990-91 in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer, 6 April 1989]:* Full-time students wil pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge, and people undertaking employment training will be entitled to claim rebates of up to 80 per cent. The level of discretionary grants is a matter for local education authorities and the level of training allowances is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Rights of Way

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to seek powers to enable him to charge for public inspection of definitive maps and statements of public rights of way, contained in section 57(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Beaches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the cost of bringing beaches in Yorkshire up to European Economic Community standards; and from what date he is expects the standards to be met.

Mr. Howard: The costs and completion date of capital works currently planned by Yorkshire water authority for improving bathing waters are set out below:

Water	*Cost £ million*	*Completion*
Robin Hood's Bay	1·3	Spring 1993
Scarborough (North and South Bays)	26·2	Summer 1991
Flamborough South Landing	1·0	Spring 1992
Withernsea	3·8	Spring 1992

Only one of these waters—that at Flamborough south landing—failed to comply with EEC standards in 1988. However, it is expected that all Yorkshire Water bathing waters will reliably meet those standards once the improvement works have been completed.

Dog Registration Scheme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the considerations which caused him to incorporate section 37 into the Local Government Act 1988;

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) of 14 February, on dog registration, *Official Report*, column *186*, if he has any plans to repeal section 37 of the Local Government Act 1988;

(3) if he has consulted local authorities and other organisations on the question of dog registration, as required by section 37 of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 37 was inserted into the Act by another place against Government advice. We accepted it so as not to delay Royal Assent. We have no plans to repeal section 37. We do not intend to introduce a dog registration scheme so that the requirement to consult local authorities does not arise.

Rates

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of total personal disposable income was expended on domestic rates in the years 1959-60, 1979-80, 1984-85 and 1987-88.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Domestic rate payments as a percentage of total personal disposable income in the United Kingdom are estimated to be 2 per cent. in 1979-80, 2·4 per cent. in 1984-85 and 2·6 per cent. in 1987-88. Information for 1959-60 is not available.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate what the level of the uniform business rate in England would have been *(a)* in 1987-88 and *(b)* in 1988-89, if introduced on existing business rateable valuations.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A uniform business rate for England set at the average level for 1987-88 would have been 224p in the pound. For 1988-89 it would have been 239·5p in the pound.

Strategic Planning (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those statutory powers in respect of strategic planning in the Greater London area which were formerly held by the Greater London council which are now not possessed by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Chope: The Local Government Act 1985 replaced the Greater London council's responsibility for preparing a structure plan under the former two-tier development plan system by providing that London borough councils prepare unitary development plans. Each plan, when it becomes operative will, for the area covered by the plan, supersede the Greater London developement plan. Since 1 April 1986 the boroughs have been responsible for handling all planning applications for which the former GLC held statutory responsibility.

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, further to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, columns *359-64*, to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), he will update the information provided where appropriate.

Mr. Gummer: The information I provided on 2 February remains the latest available.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish a list of those pesticides which he views as persistent and toxic and with a liability to bio-accumulate;

(2) if he will publish a list of those pesticides which are on his Red List for priority review.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 10 April, which included the initial list of priority substances posing a particular risk for the aquatic environment (the Red List) selected primarily on the basis of their toxicity, persistence, and liability to bio-accumulate. Of the substances on that list, the following have been or can be used as pesticides:

Some Mercury compounds
gamma-Hexachlorocyclohexane
DDT
Pentachlorophenol
Hexachlorobenzene
Aldrin
Dieldrin
Endrin
Dichlorvos
Atrizine
Simazine
Tributyltin and triphenyltin compounds
Trifluralin
Fenitrothion
Azinphos-methyl
Malathion
Endosulfan

Loughborough and Angell Town Estates

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to conduct a ballot of the tenants of the Angell town and Loughborough estates in Lambeth in relation to a housing action trust.

Mr. Trippier: Tenants in proposed housing action trust areas will be fully consulted before any ballots are held. We have already announced that the Electoral Reform Society has agreed to conduct ballots under the terms of section 61(3)(a) of the Housing Act 1988.

New Dwellings

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings were completed by local authorities and new towns in England and Wales in 1988.

Mr. Trippier: It is provisionally estimated that there were 15,400 local authority and new town completions in England for 1988. For information on housebuilding in Wales, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Empty Houses

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authority voids there were in England at the latest available date; and of this total, how many were *(a)* actually available for letting, *(b)* in various stages of repair and *(c)* empty for over 12 months.

Mr. Trippier: The information for April 1988 was reported by local authorities in the annual housing investment programme return (HIP 1) and appears in the "Housing Needs Appraisal: HIP 1 for 1988, Grossed for England", a copy of which is in the Library.

Stocken Hall, Rutland

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when a representative of his Department or of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission last visited Stocken hall, Rutland, to investigate the condition of that grade 2 listed building; and what action was taken as a result of those visits.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An inspector from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission visited Stocken hall in April 1988, at which time certain wind and weather-proofing works were being carried out. Officials from the Department carried out a brief external inspection of the building in January 1989 following discussions with the local planning authority on future action in connection with Stocken hall. We understand that the building is being offered for sale.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to use the statutory powers available to him, or encourage the use of similar powers by the local planning authority, to bring about the immediate protection and preservation of Stocken hall, Rutland, a grade 2 listed building; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has held discussions with the local planning authority about the possibility of serving a notice under section 101 of the

Town and Country Planning Act 1971 on the owner of Stocken hall. My right hon. Friend will consider whether he should authorise the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission to serve such a notice when the outcome of present attempts to sell the building is known.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list the specific action which has been taken since the reply by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) to the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton on 3 December 1986, *Official Report*, column *688*, to repair and restore the grade 2 listed building, Stocken hall, Rutland; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We understand that since December 1986 the owners have carried out urgent repairs to wind and weather-proof Stocken hall. These works include patching a large hole in the roof with bitumen felt secured with wooden battens and boarding up and covering with plastic sheeting windows which were broken. These are the type of repairs which would in many circumstances meet the requirements of section 101 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971.

Berne Convention

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether it is possible to keep, breed, sell, and kill for commercial purposes those animals listed in appendix 2 of the convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats known as the Berne convention.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In certain circumstances. I have written to the hon. Member with full details.

Boreholes (Drinking Water)

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the public buildings in Whitehall and Westminster in the care of the Property Services Agency which take drinking water from boreholes.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 March 1989]:* Thames house south, Church house.

Amazonia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the statement made on 13 March, *Official Report*, column 168 if he will make a further statement on the role Her Majesty's Government are playing in the intergovernmental panel on the climate change, and their work on clarifying the climatic consequences of deforestation in eastern Amazonia.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The United Kingdom's delegate to the UNEP/WMO intergovernmental panel on climate change is Dr. John Houghton, Director General of the Meteorological Office. The IPCC has set up three working groups, on the science of climate change, on the impacts of climate and on formulation of response strategies. All are to report by mid-1990. Dr. Houghton leads the science working group. The Government are supporting a central unit for this group, based on the Meteorological Office, and is funding working and plenary meetings. It is also supporting Dr. Martin Parry of the university of Birmingham, an internationally recognised expert on the impact of climate change, to contribute to the working group on impacts. Officials and experts from several Government Departments are contributing to the working group on response strategies. We have been assured that change in vegetation cover, which includes tropical deforestation, is one of the climate forcing factors being reviewed by the science working group.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Agency (Computer Information)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information is available to employers on computer assisted local labour information, developed by the Training Agency; what is the extent of the use of the system by employers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The key information, in the main collected from employers, held on the computer assisted local labour market information system (CALLMI), includes work force characteristics, recruitment practices and difficulties, use of new technology, and training-related data. The system itself is not directly accessible to employers, but summary analyses and reports by the Training Agency are readily available to employers and employer organisations. It is not possible to say how many employers have received copies of these reports nor to what use they have been put.

My Department, through the Training Agency and the establishment of training and enterprise councils, is committed to ensuring that all concerned with training, vocational education and enterprise have access to relevant and readily available information. CALLMI is a key tool in this process. We shall continue to seek ways of developing effective means of co-operation with other collectors and users of local labour market information, at the same time respecting the need for confidentiality concerning individual employers' data.

Agriculture (Accidents)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will estimate the number of accidents that go unreported in the agriculture industry.

Mr. Nicholls: All cases of fatal injury in the course of agricultural work activities are reported to the Health and Safety Executive's Her Majesty's agricultural inspectorate. It is not known what proportion of other reportable accidents from agricultural activities go unreported, but it is thought to be more than 50 per cent.

Career Development Loans

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have taken up career development loans since the launch of the scheme in 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: Since April 1986, 2,740 career development loans have been approved, 655 during the pilot phase and 2,085 since the scheme was launched nationally in July 1988. The total approved loan value is currently some £6·5 million.

The growth in the number of career development loans since they became available nationally last year has been

very encouraging. It has shown that many people both employed and unemployed, are willing to invest in their own future by paying for vocational training of their own choice to improve their job prospects.

Advertising

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the cost to his Department of producing the information leaflet "You and Your Union: The Employment Act 1988", and what has been the cost of advertising this package.

Mr. Nicholls: The cost to the Department of Employment of producing the information booklet "You and Your Union: the 1988 Employment Act" was £9,395. A further reprint of the booklet has been ordered to meet demand but the cost of this is not known yet. The total media cost was £277,337, excluding VAT.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest measurement of long-term unemployment in East Sussex.

Mr. Lee: The information is available from the Library. In January 1989 the number of unemployed claimants in East Sussex who had been unemployed for 12 months or more was 5,143.

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about the loss of working time resulting from mental illness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no firm figures but the booklet "Mental Health at Work", published by the Health and Safety Executive, estimated that some 30-40 per cent. of all sickness absence from work is attributable to some form of mental or emotional disturbance.

University College of Wales

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give his support to the application by the University College of Wales Swansea (Computeraid Ltd.) for European social fund grant funding.

Mr. Cope: My Department supports all European social fund applications which meet the European Commission's eligibility criteria.

Although my Department has not yet received formal notification of the European Commission's decision on United Kingdom social fund applications for 1989, we understand that the scheme to which the hon. Member refers was refused funding on what appears to be a technicality. A request therefore has been forwarded to the European Commission to review its decision.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he expects to publish his Department's internal review of employment services for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 7 November 1988 at column *54*.

Tourism (Bristol)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans further to assist Bristol city council to increase employment in tourism-related industries.

Mr. Lee: The English Tourist Board, on behalf of the Department of Employment, will be running one of its "Vision for the Cities" seminars in Bristol on 20 April 1989, as part of the Government's action for cities campaign. The aim of the seminar is to stimulate further development and investment which will expand tourism employment within the city.

Accidents

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of reported accidents were investigated by the factories inspectorate in 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: In 1987-88, 4·9 per cent. of reportable accidents reported to the factory inspectorate were investigated. All accidents involving fatal injuries were investigated. Reported accidents are selected for investigation after considering the gravity of the apparent breach, the need to give advice and the value of any information that would be obtained to prevent similar accidents.

EC Labour and Social Affairs Council

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the European Community Labour and Social Affairs Council held in Luxembourg on 5 April.

Mr. Cope: It was a very constructive meeting. The Council reached agreement on a common position on three draft directives concerning the minimum safety and health requirements in the workplace. These cover the workplace; the use by workers of machines, equipment and installations; and the use by workers of personal protective equipment. There was some discussion of a proposal for social measures to assist workers in the shipbuilding industry who are made redundant or threatened with redundancy; and family benefits for migrant workers. The Commissioner gave an oral presentation on a possible community charter of fundamental social rights. Finally, the Council reached agreement on a text of a resolution on continuing vocational training.

WALES

Baglan Road

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding the congestion along the Baglan road; and what further urgent work will be put in hand, in addition to the work on traffic lights to be installed by the West Glamorgan county council.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: A petition has been received from the Port Talbot Ratepayers Association regarding congestion at Baglan. The scheme to install part-time traffic lights at Baglan roundabout which will start in the summer, includes provision for increased carriageway widths.

Domestic Rates

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of total personal disposable income in Wales was expended on domestic rates in the years 1959-60, 1979-80, 1984-85 and 1987-88.

Mr. Grist: The estimated percentages of total personal disposable income in Wales expended on domestic rates in the years 1979-80, 1984-85 and 1987-88 are as follows. Information is not available for the year 1959-60.

	Percentage
1979-80	1·47
1984-85	1·61
1987-88	1·90

Pollution

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing for each county in Wales for each of the last three years the number of pollution incidents caused by *(a)* silage liquor, *(b)* farmyard slurry and *(c)* other pollutants.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held by the Welsh Office. I will ask the chairman of the Welsh Water Authority to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Homelessness

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many households were accepted as homeless in Wales in the calendar years 1987 and 1988; and how many applications by households there were in those years.

Mr. Grist: The numbers of households accepted as homeless in Wales in the calendar years 1987 and 1988 were 5,683 and 6,818 respectively. The numbers of cases presented during those years were 8,423 and 10,018, respectively.

Bathing Water Survey

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is now in a position to place in the Library the results of the 1988 bathing water survey.

Mr. Grist: The results of the 1988 bathing water survey have already been placed in the Library. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State for the Environment to the House on 21 February.

Sewage (Sea Discharges)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the project on research that would determine the fate of viruses discharged into the sea in sewage has now started.

Mr. Grist: Yes.

Inward Investment (Report)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish his response to the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs' report on inward investment.

Mr. Peter Walker: Shortly.

Tony Ball Associates

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what payments have been made by his Department, in each of the financial years 1987-88 and 1988-89, to Mr. Tony Ball and Tony Ball Associates, respectively; and in respect of what work or services.

Mr. Peter Walker: Mr. Tony Ball undertook a study of the craft industry free of fees. He was paid £2,154 in 1987-88 and £350 in 1988-89 to meet his expenses. In addition, Tony Ball Associates were paid £63,269 in 1987-88 and £21,673 in 1988-89 exclusive of VAT in respect of the craft industry, the enterprise Wales and the Wales land of quality initiatives. All of this work was undertaken following a competitive tender, except for the craft industry element (£3,269 in 1987-88) which was paid for at cost.

National Curriculum

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when his Department will make available to schools in Wales, the document "National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice."

Mr. Peter Walker: Because there are some differences in the content and implementation of the national curriculum in Wales, my right hon. Friend does not intend to circulate the Department of Education and Science document, "National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice" to schools in Wales. An equivalent Welsh Office document is being produced and will be issued to schools in the current term.

Community Nursing Services (Report)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will publish his response to the report of the review of community nursing services in Wales.

Mr. Grist: A circular is being issued today giving the Departmental reaction to the Community Nursing Review (CNR) report "Nursing in the Community—A Team Approach for Wales" and guidance and information as to what the next steps are to be. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

The report was, in my view, an excellent one and reaction to it has been overwhelmingly favourable. I am very grateful to Mrs. Noreen Edwards CBE, under whose chairmanship the review was conducted, and to her team for providing such a thorough analysis of community nursing in Wales and I am glad to be able to respond favourably to almost all the report's recommendations.

I have been made particularly aware of the importance of proper training and education for community nurses in Wales and we will be making additional funding available for this and for specific support for them in the operational context.

I am sure that the work stimulated by the report will have a major beneficial impact on the community nursing service in Wales for many years to come.

Population Movement

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has on the numbers of people who have moved to live *(a)* into and *(b)* out of each district authority area in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* Data from the National Health Service central registers (which relate to movements of persons on National Health Service doctors' lists) give an indication of migration into and out of Welsh counties. These are shown in the following table. Information is not available at district authority level.

Movements between family practitioner committee areas

(in thousands)

Year ended September	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
(a) Movements into:										
Clwyd	13·4	11·8	10·7	11·4	11·1	10·9	12·1	12·0	13·4	15·7
Dyfed	11·5	11·6	10·4	10·0	10·4	10·3	10·5	11·6	13·1	15·3
Gwent	8·5	8·1	8·0	7·7	7·2	7·8	8·5	8·4	9·4	11·0
Gwynedd	8·1	8·2	7·8	7·8	7·8	8·4	8·8	8·4	9·6	11·1
Mid Glamorgan	9·3	9·4	8·8	8·4	8·1	8·3	9·2	8·3	9·2	11·1
Powys	5·0	4·1	3·8	4·2	3·7	3·9	4·8	5·0	5·5	5·9
South Glamorgan	12·0	11·4	11·7	11·4	12·9	10·0	12·2	13·8	13·6	15·8
West Glamorgan	8·0	7·0	6·9	5·9	6·1	6·7	7·1	7·3	7·6	8·7
(b) Movements out of:										
Clwyd	9·7	9·4	9·7	9·3	9·2	9·5	9·8	10·1	10·2	11·6
Dyfed	8·9	8·8	8·4	8·4	8·4	9·0	8·9	9·2	9·6	10·4
Gwent	9·3	8·5	8·9	8·0	8·2	8·2	8·8	8·8	9·1	9·5
Gwynedd	7·4	7·1	6·8	6·6	7·0	7·1	7·0	7·2	7·7	8·1
Mid Glamorgan	10·6	9·9	10·2	9·2	10·0	9·5	10·1	10·5	10·6	11·3
Powys	3·9	3·4	3·3	3·4	3·4	3·6	3·7	3·9	4·0	4·3
South Glamorgan	12·8	11·9	12·2	11·5	11·9	11·2	12·8	12·3	13·2	13·7
West Glamorgan	7·8	7·3	7·0	7·1	7·2	7·0	7·2	7·9	7·9	8·4

Source: OPCS.

Note: Figures are derived from re-registration of patients with National Health Service general practitioners; for 1979 to 1983 they are based on a 10 per cent. analysis of re-registrations. Movements to or from overseas are excluded.

ENERGY

Nuclear Tax

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) whether, in setting the nuclear tax level at 10 per cent., he took into account the cost of reprocessing, decommissioning of plant and the disposal of waste;

(2) on what basis the nuclear tax of 10 per cent. is expected to drop to 3 per cent. by the year 2000;

(3) what difference in the price of generation between nuclear power and fossil fuel the nuclear tax of 10 per cent. represents;

(4) whether the nuclear tax will take effect as soon as National Power begins operation as a private company.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The fossil fuel levy is not a nuclear tax but an allocation of existing nuclear costs. It will be levied on all sales of fossil-generated power by licensed suppliers and set at a level to recover any difference in price between the costs of meeting the non-fossil obligation and what would have been the cost of purchasing that electricity if it had been generated by fossil-fuel generating stations. Negotiations on contracts for generating capacity will not be completed until later this year. It is too early to say what the prices in these contracts will be or the implications for the level of the levy, either in 1990 or later in the decade.

The contracts for nuclear generating capacity will take into account the anticipated costs of reprocessing, decommissioning of plant and the disposal of waste.

The timing of the introduction of the levy will be dealt with in regulations made by the Secretary of State under clause 31 of the Electricity Bill.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Angola

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what specific aid has been given to the Angolan Government by Her Majesty's Government in the last two years; and for which specific projects.

Mr. Chris Patten: In 1987, the most recent year for which final figures are available, expenditure was £211,000 on English language training projects and scholarships requested by the Angolan Government.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current value in pounds sterling of British Government aid to Angola.

Mr. Chris Patten: Final expenditure figures for 1988 are not yet available. In addition to continuing projects, we pledged £750,000 for emergency relief through international and non-Government organisations.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current value of European Community aid to Angola; and how this aid is managed and deployed.

Mr. Chris Patten: Some £66 million has been allocated to Angola's country programme under Lomé III, which runs from 1985 to 1990. Commitments so far have been made to agriculture, fisheries, industry and health.

Following the recent peace agreement, the Community plans to use some of the money which remains uncommitted to help with job creation and reintegrating former military personnel into civilian life. It also plans to give another £26 million for humanitarian, refugee and other assistance. In 1988 it gave some £6 million of food aid to Angola.

Proposals for aid allocations are approved by the Community member states. The Commission and its delegation in Luanda are responsible for managing projects and programmes, along with the Angolan authorities.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the value of British Government aid to individuals and agencies in Angola not associated with the MPLA-PT Government of Angola.

Mr. Chris Patten: In 1987, we provided £50,000 for relief purposes through international and non-governmental agencies.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guarantees and mechanisms are in place to ensure that British Government aid to Angola is not used for military purposes.

Mr. Chris Patten: In common with our aid to other developing countries, our aid is provided for specific purposes. In Angola these are English language training projects and scholarships.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have received from the Angolan Government concerning aid to Angola in the last two years.

Mr. Chris Patten: There are regular contacts between the two Governments about our aid programme. I had friendly discussions with President dos Santos and Ministers during my visit to Angola in February.

Developing Countries (Privatisation)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Monklands, West on 6 February, *Official Report*, column *470*, (1) if he will name those developing nations which *(a)* reacted positively and *(b)* reacted negatively to that part of his Department's private sector development exercise relating specifically to the possibility of Britain offering assistance with the privatisation of nationalised industries;

(2) what were the terms, financial or otherwise, offered to developing countries in exchange for British assistance *(a)* in the promotion of private sector development and *(b)* relating directly to the privatisation of nationalised industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: The exercise comprised an instruction to British posts in developing countries encouraging closer consultation with their United States counterparts with a view to being able to respond more effectively to developing country needs in relation to private sector development, including privatisation.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if his Department has had any discussions with *(a)* bankers, *(b)* brokers and *(c)* management consultants concerning the possibility of Britain assisting with the privatisation of developing nations' nationalised industries; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether officials from his Department have had meetings with representatives of the overseas privatisation unit of NM Rothschild; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: A variety of discussions have taken place over time. It is widely recognised that Britain' private sector has a special expertise in this field.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has established a unit within his Department to examine the possibility of Britain offering privatisation expertise to developing nations.

Mr. Chris Patten: I see no reason to establish such a unit. The Overseas Development Administration's arrangements for managing bilateral aid already enable it fully to consider proposals related to all aspects of private sector development including privatisation.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the cost to date of the exercise undertaken to identify opportunities for assisting developing countries with the promotion of private sector development, including privatisation.

Mr. Chris Patten: The exercise has not resulted in significant additional expense. Providing the information requested would involve disproportionate cost, far exceeding any costs which the exercise itself has incurred.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to conclude agreements with developing countries which would include Her Majesty's Government assisting with the privatisation of nationalised industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: There are no immediate plans for the conclusion of such agreements, but we have always made clear that we are ready to consider helping where we can.

USAID

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates and locations when his officials have met representatives of the organisation USAID over the past two years.

Mr. Chris Patten: Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials, both at home and overseas, are in frequent touch with USAID officials.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Urban Development Grants

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in which urban areas applications for urban development grants are now being accepted.

Mr. Needham: Applications for urban development grant funded by the Government are being accepted in Belfast and Londonderry. Under the second urban development programme funded by the international monetary fund for Ireland the advertised closing date for applications was 28 February 1989. Consequently, only in Belfast and Londonderry are applications now being accepted.

Dwellings (Valuation)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many dwellings in Northern Ireland have a net annual valuation of less than £60.

Mr. Ian Stewart: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent in Northern Ireland in the last year on the care and treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia; and what percentage that figure represented of total expenditure on *(a)* mental and *(b)* all health services.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current annual cost per patient to the National Health Service in Northern Ireland of the care and treatment of patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available.

Knackeries

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what study his Department has made of the Group Public Health Committee's report "The Unfit Meat Trade in Northern Ireland, Law and Enforcement Review" and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Departments of Agriculture and Health and Social Services are considering the detailed recommendations made in the report and will issue a response shortly.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to bring forward new measures for the control of licensed knackeries to prevent unfit meat entering the human food chain.

Mr. Needham: A draft order in Council is being prepared by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland which will provide for prescription in regulations of the standards to be met by knackeries, before such premises are licensed by district councils.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prosecutions have been brought against those operating illegal knackeries or trading in unfit meat during the last five years; what convictions have been obtained; and what penalties have been imposed.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Offence	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Total fines (plus costs)* £
(i) Operating illegal knackery	11	10	350
(ii) Trading in unfit meat	42	42	1,965

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what specific and formal advice and assistance is available for those wishing to set up properly licensed and supervised knackeries to deal with fallen and casualty animals.

Mr. Needham: Any person wishing to set up a knackery can obtain advice from the environmental health department of the district council in whose area the proposed knackery would be situated. The advice would include information on licensing arrangements, siting and standards of premises and conditions to be observed in handling, treatment and movement of any unfit meat and the keeping of records.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list existing licensed knackeries, with the location of each and the service each offers to farmers.

Mr. Needham: There are two licensed knackeries in Northern Ireland—Lisburn By-Products Ltd., Moira road, Lisburn and Ulster Farm By-Products Ltd., Glenavy. Both knackeries provide farmers with an essential means of disposal of casualty and dead animals.

Computer Consultants

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1988 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; and if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1988, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The total amount spent on management and computer consultancy in 1988 was £4,402,979. The remainder of the information is as follows:

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Aims Systems	Structured Systems Analysis Design Methodology (SSADM) Consultancy
Aims Training	SSADM
Anderson and Co.	IT resourcing
Apricot Ltd.	Microcomputer Skills
Associated Marketing (NI) Ltd.	Marketing Appraisals
W. S. Atkins Management Consultants	Market Research
Atkins Planning	Marketing Appraisals

Firm	Subject of assignment
D. E. Barnard Systems Ltd.	Historic Monuments/Building Branch Strategy Study Country/Wildlife Branch Strategy Study Training Division Project
Basil Singleton	Assessing potential of Health Service sites for advertising hoardings
BDO Binder Hamlyn	Financial Appraisals and Marketing Appraisals
Belmin Systems Ltd.	Development of NI Parliamentary index
BIC Systems Ltd.	Microcomputer Skills
Binder Hamlyn	Industrial Science Division project
BIS Beecom	Management Information System Marketing Appraisals
BIS Beecom (International) Ltd.	Incentive Bonus schemes in DOE (NI) Works Service Specialised communication aspects of Integrated Computer System in DOE (NI) roads Service. Integrated Computer System in DOE Water Service. Monitoring Equal Opportunities in Public Bodies, Roads and Water Services integrated systems. User awareness—consultancy skills
BIS Mackintosh	Marketing Appraisals Information on EEC anti-dumping tariffs as applicable to electronics companies
BPA (Tech Mangt) Ltd.	Annual subscription to BPA Compass Scheme
Brennan and Simmons	Leadership Training Training for Trainers
British Telecom	Government Network
Capita	DENI IT Strategy Social Security Fraud Scrutiny Human Resource Management System Advanced Office Management Information System
CARA Data	Project Management
CCTA	Project Support IT Development Study Strategy enabling study Review of Bureau Services
Centrehouse Management	Financial appraisals
J. T. Chambers	Analysis of transportation costs for an inward investment company
CIPFA	Training for NICS Internal Auditors
CIPFA Services Ltd.	Integrated Computer System in DOE (NI) Water Service
CI Training	Microcomputer Skills
Collingwood Harris	Business Co-operation: Feasibility study Company Matchmaking in Maryland, USA
Common Service Agency Scotland	Community Health Index Project
John Compton Associates	Marketing Appraisals
Computer Science Co. Ltd.	Departmental Information Technology
Construction Industry Computer Association	Procurement of computer aided design system
Consulting Partners International	Marketing Appraisals

Firm	Subject of assignment
Coopers & Lybrand	NI Emigration Package Development and implementation of information technology strategy for social security benefit payments Review of the Training Levy "Total Quality Centre" feasibility study Joint study with NM Rothchild & Sons Ltd—preliminary study on the privatisation of NIE Application of Clerical Work Measurement Project Sponsors Financial & Marketing Appraisals Company Appraisals To review the present arrangements for testing motor vehicles in Northern Ireland and advise on the feasibility of the privatisation of this function The supervision and monitoring the affairs of the NI Transport Holding Company and the three subsiduary transport operating companies
Cork Gully	Study into the Procedures for Investigating Personal Bankruptcy
C S College	PROMPT
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Integrated Computer System in DOE (NI) Roads Service Company Appraisals Financial & marketing Appraisals
Department of the Environment	Building project advice
Department of Finance & Personnel (PPRU)	Survey of the disabled
Department of Information Services, University of Ulster	Consultancy Services for Road Survey Vehicle project Support for software/electronics presentations in US Support for presentation to company in Switzerland
D J S Consultants	Marketing Appraisals
Denham Nash	Consultancy Skills Training User Awareness
Diane Bailey Associates	Staff Training
Digital Equipment Co	Office automation
Elite Consultancy Services	Project cost monitoring
EOSYS	Data Communication
Ernst and Whinney	Financial Appraisals
ESCO Management Consultants	European salary survey for software industry Analysis of large computer sites in Northern Ireland
Pauline Farrell	Leadership Training Training for Trainers
FIRA	Marketing Appraisals
Flynn Moore	Financial Appraisals
Focon International	Marketing Appraisals
Furniture Industry Research Association	Kitchen furniture—GB Market Survey
Gilpin Black Associates	Financial Appraisals Management Training for Professional Staff
Gloria Henderson Management Consultancy	Social Security Fraud Scrutiny
Gryphon Group	Provision Business Pack Stage 1, distance learning video/audio pack aimed at business management
W. Halcrow	Efficiency study in the DOE (NI) Environmental Protection Division
Hanna Thompson and Co.	Financial Appraisals
Stephen Hughes Associates	Marketing Appraisals

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Victor Hausner and Associates	Belfast Special Action Group/Belfast Initiative
HAY-MSL	Review of salaries of senior NI Housing Executive Staff
IBI Corporate Services	Financial Appraisals Study re sale of shares in textile company
ICL	Systems Performance and Data Communications Training Division Project VME
Industrial Training Services	Community Projects Branch—Staff Training Review of health service personnel function Community Workshops Evaluation Monitoring of Recognised Training Organisations
Investment Bank of Ireland	Study re sale of shares in textile company
Jackson Andrews	Financial Appraisals
Mark Jampolc	Business Co-operation: Feasibility report; then Company match-making; in North West Pennsylvania
Kleinwort Benson	Privatisation of Short Bros PLC
Knight Wendling	Technical Appraisals
Knowledge Tech Ltd	Training Division Project
KPMG Peat Marwick	Report on the UK market for sheep's milk and sheep's milk products Update of study into the commercial viability of an irradiation facility in Northern Ireland. The original study was carried out in 1986
Kurt Salmon Associates	Study of the NI Clothing Industry
Lazard Bros	Privatisation of Harland and Wolff
Learmont and Burchett	Implemeniation of PROMPT Department of Agriculture Fatstock project—SSADM Project Control
Lindsay Marketing	Marketing Appraisal
Gordon Lyell Associates	The presentation and marketing of Historic Monuments in Northern Ireland, and in particular Carrickfergus Castle
C. and K. MacFarlane	Marketing Appraisals
Stuart McKechanie	Assignment Skills
J. Leslie McKeown	Financial Appraisals
R. A. McLaughlin	Assisting with the management of the EC Star (advanced telecommunications) Programme
D. J. MacRitchie	Financial Appraisals
Mrs. D. Phillips	To review the functions of the DOE (NI): Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch and the legislation under which it operates
Practical Management Consultants	Marketing Appraisals
Price Waterhouse	Evaluation of Training Programme for people in employment Study into the Comparative Corporate and Regional Tax Systems of the UK and ROI Statutory audit of Northern Health Board Company Appraisals Financial and Marketing Appraisals
John McVeigh and Co.	Financial appraisals
Mandelo Development Consultants	Study of contracting-out of economic development activities
A. Manning Associates	Team development
Marceton Ltd.	Marketing appraisals

Firm	Subject of assignment
Market Research Scotland	Marketing appraisals
Market Research UK	Marketing appraisals
Marketing and Management Information Services	Marketing appraisals
Meconsult Ltd.	Evaluation of Information Technology Centre
Mindworks Partnership	Business analysis training
Muir and Addy Management Services	Financial appraisals
E. F. Munrose and Associates	Marketing appraisals
Netherlands Economic Institute	Prospects of economic development in NI
Northern Bank	Pre-retirement
NI Council on Alcohol	Alcohol awareness
North West Design Engineers	Company appraisals
Oracle	Obstetrics project
Oracle UK	Oracle implementation 4 G. L. training
PA Consulting Services	Introduction of a total quality management programme Preparation of guideline standards for work study
PA Management Consultants	Marketing appraisals
Peat Marwick	Company appraisals Financial-marketing appraisals Marketing appraisals
P. E. Consulting Group	Marketing appraisals
Peterborough Software	UNIPAY system
Michael Peters Group plc	Provision of design clinics for NI business community "Profit by Design"
PRI Consultants	Evaluation of Voluntary Organisations with regard to Grant Aid
Queen's University, Belfast	Administrative Law, Basic Book-keeping, Investment Appraisal, Management Accounting, Policy Management, Tuition for Institute of Internal Auditors Examinations, Understanding Company Accountants
Quinn and Co.	Financial Appraisals
David Rigby Associates	Company Appraisals
Roffey Park	Training for Trainers
RMA Management Consultants	Company Appraisals
N. M. Rothchild and Sons Ltd.	Joint study with Coopers and Lybrand—Preliminary study on the privatisation of NIE
Saville/Holdsworth	Block funding assessment project
Sherwood Systems Ltd.	Dataflex
Shirley M. Holt Associates	Marketing Appraisals
Alan Smyth Associates	Retention of services as IDB Quality Co-ordinator
Software Ireland	Management Information System, Valuation/Land office
Stamen	Horticultural activities for the mentally handicapped
Strategic Training Ltd.	Marketing training courses for NI business management
Syntek Ltd.	To review Transit computer procedures Training Division project

Firm	*Subject of assignment*
Telebriton Ltd.	Pilot Study—Defence Sector Market Strategy for NI Identification of possible inward investment projects Identification of possible inward investment projects Software Fair in NIBC, London
Time Consulting Group	Software Strategy for NI—Investigation of the role of a Resource Centre
Hans Tolin	Business Co-operation: Feasibility report Company matchmaking with Swedish companies
Touche Ross	Privatisation and monitoring of Harland & Wolff Privatisation and monitoring of Short Bros PLC Financial/Marketing Appraisals Internal Audit Development Mental Health Service Audit Provision of NI Trade Director 1989 and Local Sourcing Database Analysis of transportation costs to and from various locations Market Research Company Appraisals Comparison of tax (personal and corporate) regimes in various European countries
Training and Development Associates	Young People's Programme
University of Ulster	Export Research Project Personal Computers Appreciation Policy Analysis Policy Management Report on research activities in informatics at NI universities
United Medical Enterprises	Studies in connection with the export of NI Health Care Expertise
Ritchie Ward Associates	Project Management Project Sponsors
Warne Franklin	RAPRA Project—Technological Consultancy
Wilt Thornton	Financial Appraisals
Xentec	To review Transit computer procedures

Mr. William Strathearn

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 4 September 1988 about Mr. William Strathearn.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* No. It is not our usual practice to publish correspondence of this kind.

Regional Rates

Mr. Clifford Forsyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will explain the methodology employed in striking the regional rate for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* I refer the hon. Member to the explanation of the regional rate methodology given in the information note "Northern Ireland Regional Rate 1989-90" which is available in the House of Commons Library in support of the Rates (Regional Rate) Order (Northern Ireland) 1989 which was laid before Parliament on 7 March 1989.

SCOTLAND

"Working for Patients"

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to the number of overseas patients that can be treated in the self-managing hospitals proposed in the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We are considering how treatment of overseas patients in National Health Service hospitals, including self-governing hospitals, might best be administered in the context of the White Paper and the associated working papers.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received on the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Some 600 letters have been received, offering comments and suggestions in relation to various aspects of the White Paper.

Private Secretary (Under-Secretary of State)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects a new private secretary for the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health and Education, the hon. Member for Stirling, (Mr. Forsyth) to be in post.

Mr. Rifkind: There are no immediate plans to replace my hon. Friend's private secretary.

Conifers

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will seek to alter the different tree-planting grants to eliminate the 300 per cent. differential between farm schemes and commercial schemes in the planting of conifers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. Farmers have a choice as to which scheme they apply to enter.

Edinburgh-Carlisle Trunk Road

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the schemes approved and their expected completion dates for improvements to the A7 Edinburgh-Carlisle trunk road.

Mr. Rifkind: The major A7 schemes in the trunk road programme are the north Middleton diversion, the Dalkeith bypass and the Langholm bypass. Works started on the north Middleton bypass in March. Advance works on the Dalkeith bypass are expected to start in May or June and the main works in October. The contract period for both schemes is 24 months and they should therefore be completed during 1991. The Langholm bypass will not complete its statutory and design stages before the mid-1990s.

Mental Illness

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority residential places are currently available for those discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland; what is the current rate of occupancy; and what are the projected figures for the next two years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about the provision of residential places is given in annual statistical returns from local authorities. At 31 March 1988 the provisional number of residential places in local authority establishments was 167; the occupancy rate was 61 per cent. The local authorities' returns do not extend to planned provision.

University Grants

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the Scottish Education Department grant regulations which prohibit individuals who hold a higher national diploma qualification from receiving a full grant for a university course.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under present rules, eligible students who complete a course leading to a higher national diploma may qualify for a student's allowance for the third and any subsequent year of a full-time degree or comparable course.

With effect from session 1989-90, my right hon. and learned Friend has decided that those higher national diplomates who wish to proceed to undertake full-time studies at degree level in the sciences, technology, or certain teacher shortage subjects will, exceptionally, be entitled to grant assistance for the second and any subsequent year of a degree or comparable course.

Housing

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many dwellings were completed by local authorities and new towns in Scotland in 1988.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Although a number of returns have yet to be received, we estimate that almost 2,000 dwellings were completed by local authorities in Scotland in 1988. Returns submitted by new town development corporations indicate that 257 dwellings were completed during the year.

Homelessness

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many households were accepted as homeless in Scotland in the calendar years 1987 and 1988; and how many applications by households there were in those years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Returns submitted by local authorities indicate that during 1987, 23,882 households applied to be considered under the homelessness legislation. Of these, authorities assessed 9,317 as being homeless. A comparable figure for 1988 cannot be provided at present as most local authorities still have returns outstanding.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of unemployed people in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland who have been helped to start a business through the enterprise allowance scheme in each year since its inception; and how many of these schemes have failed in each year.

Mr. Lang: The number of unemployed people who started their own business with the help of the enterprise allowance scheme in each year since its inception in August 1983 in the areas requested is set out in the table.

Enterprise allowance scheme

Year	*Entrants*		
	Greenock and Port Glasgow	*Strathclyde*	*Scotland*
1983-84 (August to March)	26	585	2,249
1984-85	48	1,352	3,794
1985-86	79	1,601	5,311
1986-87	105	2,386	8,260
1987-88	122	2,779	9,894
1988-89	101	2,558	8,494

Information on the number of these businesses which have subsequently failed is not available. However, the latest national survey shows that of those businesses completing 12 months on the scheme 74 per cent. were still trading 18 months after start-up with 65 per cent. still trading three years after start-up.

Working Women

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the annual number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time working women for each year since 1979 in (i) Greenock and Port Glasgow, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Lang: The table gives the number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time women employees in employment in Scotland for September each year since 1979, and the available information on women employees in employment for Strathclyde region and Greenock and Port Glasgow parliamentary constituency.

Information for Strathclyde and Greenock and Port Glasgow is available only from the 1981 and 1984 census of employment. For 1981 analyses for parliamentary constituencies do not distinguish full-time from part-time employees.

The figures for Scotland for 1984 onwards may be revised when the results of the 1987 census of employment available later this year.

Employees in employment full and part-time women workers at September

	Thousands	
	Full-time	*Part-time*
Scotland		
1979	571·6	330·8
1980	558·9	331·5
1981	534·2	337·8
1982	508·0	340·4
1983	503·6	336·8
1984	505·1	346·0
1985	504·9	363·2
1986	499·7	366·6
1987	503·3	380·7
1988	528·7	381·9
Strathclyde		
1981	252·3	146·9
1984	233·4	144·4
Greenock and Port Glasgow		
1981	13·7	
1984	8·3	4·6

General Practitioners (Contract)

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from general practitioners in the Eastwood constituency about a new contract for general practice in the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In addition to the discussions with my hon. Friend and the representations he has received on behalf of general practitioners in his constituency my right hon. and learned Friend and I have received representations from general practitioners throughout Scotland many of which have been helpful to us in drawing up a new contract for general practice in the National Health Service in Scotland. That new contract has been sent to the General Medical Services Committee and I am sending a personal copy to every general practitioner in Scotland. The document is being published in Scotland today and copies have been placed in the Library.

DEFENCE

Alcohol Consumption

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy with regard to the supply and consumption of alcohol on board Royal Navy vessels as it applies to *(a)* officers and *(b)* ratings.

Mr. Neubert: Ratings on board Royal Navy vessels are limited in their daily onboard alcohol consumption. No specific limits are placed on officers but it is the responsibility of commanding officers to ensure that alcohol consumption of all personnel is not excessive. Drunkenness, even off duty and ashore, is an offence under the Naval Discipline Act, which can attract a punishment of up to two years imprisonment.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if submarines carrying nuclear weapons carry alcohol for consumption by the crew while the vessel is on active duty.

Mr. Neubert: Yes.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the navies which contribute to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation; and if he will indicate which do and do not permit alcohol consumption on board vessels.

Mr. Neubert: As far as I am aware only the United States Navy does not permit alcohol consumption on board.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate, by type, of the alcohol consumed on board Royal Navy vessels in the latest available year; and if he will indicate consumption differences between the wardroom and lower deck.

Mr. Neubert: Records are not maintained centrally. To obtain the information requested would involve disproportionate cost and effort, requiring individual returns from Royal Navy ships worldwide.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in view of the recent court martial of the commanding officer of a submarine, who because of alcohol consumption was unable to be on board at the time of sailing and whose intake of alcohol started on board, he will review the policy of allowing alcohol consumption on board Royal Navy vessels.

Mr. Neubert: No. The policy on alcohol consumption aboard Royal Navy vessels takes full account of operational safety and efficiency while allowing those who so desire a moderate level of alcohol consumption during off-duty hours. By virtue of being at sea, frequently for long periods, Royal Navy personnel are already severely restricted in their freedom of choice of off-duty activity without considering further curtailment.

Specialist Staff

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has to suggest that it will be easier to recruit specialist staff for the directorate general of defence quality assurance in Teesside than in south east England.

Mr. Sainsbury: The directorate general of defence quality assurance is currently experiencing difficulty in recruiting specialist staff to work in south-east England, despite the higher pay allowances offered.

The level of unemployment in the likely travel-to-work area for the proposed site is considerably higher than in the south-east. We would expect to be able to recruit or train people with the technical skills and expertise we require from Teesside which has a strong heavy engineering, process and chemical engineering tradition.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many units of battalion or equivalent size, are currently serving in an infantry role in Northern Ireland, and as part of the permanent garrison are on short-term detachment; and what have been the figures in each year since 1969.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Soldiers (Costs)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current annual cost of a Regular Army soldier and of a Territorial Army soldier.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The estimated annual cost at 1987-88 prices of a regular soldier is £14,100, and of a Territorial Army soldier £2,500. These figures cover pay and allowances, personal equipment and other support costs and in the case of the Regular Army soldier, elements for training and non-effective benefits. Training cost figures for Territorial Army soldiers are not separately identifiable without disproportionate cost and effort.

Nuclear Convoys

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what prior warning was given to local authorities, both district and region, in the Clydeside area of the passage of nuclear convoys during the three weeks beginning Monday 20 March.

(2) what is his policy for alerting local authorities to the imminent passage of nuclear naval convoys through their area.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been the long-standing practice of successive Governments neither to confirm nor to deny the presence of nuclear weapons at any particular location, and it is not our policy to inform local authorities of nuclear weapon movements. We do, however, inform local police forces, who are responsible for road traffic control.

Anti-tank Weapons (Movements)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether light anti-tank weapons en route by rail and road from Royal Ordnance, Chorley to Ministry of Defence establishments are guarded by an armed escort.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It would not be in the interests of security to divulge the arrangements for the physical protection of military stores during transit.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the danger of theft of light anti-tank weapons in transit from Royal Ordnance, Chorley, to Ministry of Defence establishments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The danger of theft of these stores is constantly reviewed in the light of the security threat assessment. It would not be in the interests of security to divulge the current assessment.

Rolls-Royce

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list in the *Official Report* the value of headquarter contracts awarded to Rolls-Royce Ltd. and Rolls-Royce plc by his Department for goods and services destined for the British armed services in each of the five years to 31 March 1988.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The value of headquarters contracts awarded to Rolls-Royce Ltd. and Rolls-Royce plc. for goods and services destined for the British armed forces in each of the five years to 31 March 1988 were as follows:

	£ million
1983-84	370·00
1984-85	390·00
1985-86	445·00
1986-87	300·00
1987-88	220·00

HEALTH

Meningitis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been made available by his Department for research into the causes of clusters of meningitis; and if he will make a statement on what results have so far been obtained.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant-in-aid from this Department, is the main agency through which the Government support medical research. The council is funding a range of research into meningitis, and details are available in the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 21 December 1988 at column *291-92*. The Council is not, however, funding research into the causes of clusters of meningitis.

The council is always ready to consider soundly based scientific proposals for funding of new research, in competition with other applications.

Griffiths Report

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department expects to publish the Government's response to the Griffiths report on community care.

Mr. David Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he now intends to implement the terms of the Griffiths report "An Agenda for Action."

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member and the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 6 April 1989 at column *291*.

Eye and Dental Examinations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has on the numbers of people who currently have eye tests and dental examinations *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the appropriate area covering Nottingham.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 24 November at column *261*. I regret that the local information requested is not available.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Trent regional health authority buildings have wet-air cooling air conditioning systems fitted; what action is being carried out to have them replaced by a different type of air conditioning system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Information available centrally shows that the following buildings in the Trent region had wet-spray cooling towers in July 1986:

Leicester Royal Infirmary
Leicester General Hospital
Glenfield General Hospital
Groby Road Hospital
Derby Royal Infirmary
Derby City Hospital
Bassetlaw District General Hospital
Doncaster Royal Infirmary
Nottingham City Hospital
Queens Medical Centre
Q M C University Hospital
Grantham Hospital
Pilgrim Hospital
Lincoln County Hospital
Balderton Hospital
Barnsley District General Hospital
Northern General Hospital
Royal Hallamshire Hospital
Rotherham District General Hospital
Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital
Scarsdale Hospital

The Department issued preliminary guidance in May 1987 and a detailed code of practice on the control of legionellae in health care premises in July 1988. Both the preliminary guidance and the code of practice recommended against premature replacement of wet-spray systems, unless these cannot be operated safely in accordance with specified technical criteria.

Chiropody

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North, of Tuesday 29 November, *Official Report*, column *187-88*, whether all patients on the home treatment list for chiropody have received written confirmation of continuing home treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for the management of local health services rests with the district health authority concerned (in this case Nottingham health authority). I suggest that the hon. Member contacts the chairman of Nottingham health authority for the information he seeks.

Birth Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year from 1979 the estimated percentage of women delivering in the Trent regional health authority whose deliveries were *(a)* spontaneous, including abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous, *(b)* instrumental, including forceps, vacuum and for breech extraction, *(c)* caesarean section and *(d)* other unspecified means.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The table shows the mode of delivery for women normally resident in Trent RHA.

The estimates are derived from the hospital in-patient enquiry (HIPE) data collection which closed 1985. Data from 1981 is unreliable and has been excluded from the table.

Mode of delivery for women normally resident in Trent RHA

Percentages

Year	*Spontaneous*[1]	*Instrumental*[2]	*Caesarean*	*Other and unspecified*
1979	77·0	14·8	7·8	0·4
1980	75·1	15·7	9·1	0·1
1981	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982	75·5	14·3	10·2	0·0
1983	75·7	14·3	10·0	0·0
1984	76·0	13·8	10·2	0·0
1985	78·6	12·6	8·7	0·0

[1] Includes abnormal presentation of head and breech spontaneous.
[2] Includes forceps, vacuum and breech extraction.
n/a = Data not available.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year from 1979 to date the estimated percentage of women delivering in the Trent regional health authority *(a)* whose labours were induced, *(b)* whose labours were of spontaneous onset and *(c)* who had elective caesarean section.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. The table shows the mode of delivery for women normally resident in Trent RHA.

The estimates are derived from the hospital in-patient enquiry (HIPE) data, collection around in 1985. Data from 1981 is unreliable and has been excluded from the table.

Induction of labour (with mode of delivery) for women normally resident in Trent RHA

Percentages

Year	*Induced labours*	*Labours of spontaneous onset*	*Elective caesarean sections*
1979	25·1	70·5	4·4
1980	23·4	72·9	3·7
1981	n/a	n/a	n/a
1982	20·5	75·0	4·5
1983	21·6	74·2	4·2
1984	18·3	77·1	4·6
1985	18·1	78·4	3·5

n/a = Data not available.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in implementing section 5 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 in respect of its obligation to place duties upon educational authorities and social services authorities to identify, assess and provide for the needs of people with mental handicaps at the time that they move out of full-time education; and what arrangements have been made to ensure that these facilities are being monitored in respect of their implementation in terms of quality of life.

Mr. Mellor: Section 5 of the Act, which came into force on 1 February 1988, requires local authorities to identify all disabled school leavers, including those with mental handicaps, and assess their needs for welfare services. Although children leaving school in 1990 will be the first

group to fall within these provisions, we have asked local authorities to undertake similar functions for as many disabled children leaving school before that date as possible. The Department's social services inspectorate is undertaking two inspections of the implementation of sections 5 and 6 of the Act.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement sections 1 and 2 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and whether he will meet the cost implications required to appoint authorised representatives for all people with mental handicaps in connection with the provision of services and the right to obtain relevant information to facilitate an informed choice of a selection of appropriate support services.

Mr. Mellor: We have accepted the view of the local authority associations that detailed work, including costings, on sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Act should follow implementation of section 7.

Immunopathology

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for the Trent regional health authority *(a)* the number and *(b)* the locations of consultants in immunopathology; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The total number of consultants in post for immunopathology in the Trent region as at 30 September 1987 is five (3·3 whole-time equivalent). This includes permanent paid, honorary and locum staff.

Consultant contracts are held by the employing regional health authority and teaching districts, so information is not available centrally on locations of those working in one or more districts.

Mental Health Act 1983

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the code of practice required under section 118 of the Mental Health Act 1983 will be laid before the House.

Mr. Freeman: There has been extensive consultation on two drafts of the code. I have established a small working group of people with wide experience of mental health matters to consider the comments received and produce a final draft, which we expect to lay before the House this autumn. The composition of the working group is as follows:

Chairman:

Mr. A. J. Collier, CB—formerly deputy secretary, Department of Health and Social Security;

Members:

Mr. M. Brown—Director of nursing (mental health) west Lambeth health authority;
Mrs. J. Miles—General manager, priority care services unit, Aylesbury Vale health authority;
Professor E. Murphy—Consultant psychiatrist and deputy chairman, mental health act commission;
Mr. N. Welch—Principal social worker, Oxfordshire county council social services department;

Secretary:

Mr. W. Bingley—Legal director of MIND, on secondment to the Department of Health while acting as secretary;

Assistant secretary:

Mrs. M. Houston—Department of Health.

Census Information

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will authorise any extension to the release of information from censuses more recent than 1881.

Mr. Freeman: Public access to individual census returns less than 100 years old is not generally permissible. However, I am prepared to extend the existing special arrangements which apply to the censuses of 1891 and 1901 and allow, subject to the consent of the person concerned or of direct descendant, for the release to researchers of the information recorded about that person's age and place of birth. This information may now be released also in respect of persons who die childless, provided the consent of the next of kin is given, and it will be available additionally to public trustee administrators seeking to trace possible beneficiaries to the estate of a deceased person. A charge for this service, approximating to the cost of providing it, will be made by the registrar general.

"Working for Patients"

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had from disability organisations on the National Health Service White Paper "Working for Patients."

Mr. Mellor: We have received representations so far from three different organisations in the disability field. We are taking the opportunity of the response to emphasise to them that the continued provision of services for disabled and chronically sick people will be ensured by the White Paper proposals.

Rheumatologists

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of health districts do not have a rheumatologist in post.

Mr. Mellor: Figures for September 1987 show than 34 per cent. of the 191 health districts in England did not have a rheumatologist in post.

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to publicise the effects of systematic lupus erythematosus.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is not involved directly in publicising the effects of this disease, but welcomes the important work done by organisations such as Arthritis Care.

Artificial Limbs and Appliances

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the bodies which have a statutory duty or powers to provide orthoses, prostheses or special equipment to people with disabilities; if he will specify in each case the particular circumstances in which such equipment can be provided and any restrictions on its use; if he has any plans to rationalise the provision of these services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: A wide range of bodies provide equipment to disabled people for purposes including education and

employment. Detailed responsibility in fields of health and social services with regard to equipment for disabled are as follows.

The duty to provide the facilities in question for people with disabilities arises from the duty of the Secretary of State under the National Health Service Act 1977 to promote the establishment in England and Wales of a comprehensive health service. This duty is discharged through various bodies.

District health authorities may provide orthotic appliances, footwear and certain types of prosthesis, when the patient has been examined and the appliance etc. prescribed by or under the direction of a consultant, either at a hospital, or at a clinic or on the occasion of a domiciliary visit.

Where provision or renewal of such appliances is recommended, the consultant may, if satisfied that the condition has reached stability, decide that supply be continued for a stated period of up to five years. In the case of breast prostheses and wigs, there is no such limit.

Following referral from a general practitioner to a consultant ophthalmologist, low vision aids may be prescribed through the hospital eye service's low vision clinic.

Hearing aids may be prescribed by a hospital consultant following referral from a general practitioner they are supplied and fitted on free loan by NHS hearing centres.

Communication aids may be prescribed by a hospital consultant to help with speech and language impairment.

Equipment to enable people to be nursed in their own home may be supplied free to out-patients being actively treated or to discharged in-patients, for as long as it is required. This equipment may be on loan and returnable; or consumable.

General practitioners may prescribe certain equipment as items on the drug tariff. This includes some incontinence equipment (but not pads and garments which are obtainable, if necessary, through the community nursing services). People with stomas requiring ostomy equipment are permanently exempt from the usual charges.

The Disablement Services Authority supplies artificial limb prostheses. Its doctors assess people who are referred by their surgeon or general practitioner.

The Disablement Services Authority supplies on loan a range of wheelchairs on the recommendation of any NHS doctor. It will also meet the cost of repair to wheelchairs except in the case of misuse or neglect. Such equipment should be returned when no longer needed.

The Disablement Services Authority also has powers to provide a range of services to war pensioners, including orthopaedic footwear, surgical appliances, hearing aids, wigs and home nursing equipment. (War pensioners may also obtain these services through their local district health authority.)

The Department of Health provides certain services directly.

The Artificial Eye Service provides artificial eyes, cosmetic shells and orbital facial prostheses through its clinics.

Environmental control equipment for severely disabled people may be provided on free loan to people meeting specific criteria as assessed by certain doctors acting on the authority of regional medical Officers (this authority is devolved to district medical officers in some regions).

Where they are satisfied of need, local authority social services departments have a duty which includes the provision of facilities to meet the needs of a disabled person. Local authorities may make a charge for such services and, where appropriate, equipment should be returned when no longer required. This equipment includes wheelchairs for temporary use.

The services of the Disablement Services Authority will pass to district health authorities on 1 April 1991 and negotiations are well in hand on the best way of carrying these services forward in future, in the light of local circumstances in each region and district.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has regarding the arrangements which exist for the interchange of information between ambulance services in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Regional ambulance officers are responsible for ensuring co-operation and co-ordination of ambulance services within their region and they hold regular meetings for that purpose with the chief ambulance officers of these services. Regional ambulance officers themselves form a group which meets regularly with departmental officials to facilitate the exchange of information between services. In addition, ad hoc seminars and conferences are held when necessary to discuss matters of national import.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current standards of training provided for ambulance crews in England.

Mr. Freeman: The National Health Service Training Authority is the body responsible for devising the programme of training and syllabi for ambulance staff and in addition it also monitors extended training in the skills of advanced resuscitation. Training is carried out by regional ambulance training schools.

All grades of employees must attend appropriate courses as determined by their employing authority. To attain the grade of qualified ambulanceman, an employee must undertake a six-week approved course in ambulance aid; a two-week driver course; complete at least 12 months on operational duties and be assessed by the employing authority as competent over the whole range of duties. Qualified and leading ambulancemen must attend a two-week post-proficiency course in ambulance aid at intervals of no more than five years.

NHS Finance

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects district health authorities and any National Health Service self-governing hospitals to be paying market rates of interest under the proposals on his capital charges working paper on the National Health Service on their land building and equipment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The rate of interest used in the calculation of capital charges will be set in line with the discount rate for the non-trading part of the public sector. The Chief Secretary recently announced that this rate will be 6 per cent. The capital charges scheme will not apply to

self-governing hospitals. Self-governing hospitals will have an intitial debt equal to the value of the capital assets transferred; the total arrangements for servicing the capital of self-governing hospitals will be consistent with the capital charging scheme.

Benzodiazepine

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission the Institute of Psychiatry to carry out research into *(a)* the number of children in the United Kingdom addicted to benzodiazepines, *(b)* the number of adults in the United Kingdom addicted to benzodiazepines, *(c)* the number of people placed in psychiatric hospitals in the United Kingdom in order to withdraw from benzodiazepines and *(d)* the number of people on sick or invalidity benefit in the United Kingdom following benzodiazepine withdrawal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* There are no plans at present for the Department to commission research in the specific areas referred to by the hon. Member. However, the Department has sponsored a significant body of research relevant to benzodiazepines, mainly through the Institute of Psychiatry. In addition, the Medical Research Council, which is the main agency through which the Government support medical research in the United Kingdom and which receives its grant from the Department of Education and Science, is supporting a team at the Institute of Psychiatry which is examining the effects of benzodiazepines on mental function.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what figures are available showing the trend of benzodiazepine prescriptions in 1988.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in Great Britain in the period January to June 1988 compared with 1987 was as follows:

	Number of prescriptions millions
January to June 1987	12·7
July to December 1987	12·8
January to June 1988	11·9
July to December 1988	n/a

n/a—Not available.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to prevent the prescription of benzodiazepines to children under the age of 16 years.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* No. The benzodiazepines are clinically useful in treating children. Some of the drugs are essential for the treatment of epilepsy and they are valuable for short-term use to relieve acute anxiety. Occasional use of the drugs to treat night terrors and somnambulism may also be justified. It is up to doctors to prescribe the drugs properly in accordance with the guidance available to them.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he will request the Committee on Safety of Medicines to issue further advice to doctors in the light of the increase in prescriptions for benzodiazepines in 1987;

(2) what advice the Committee on Safety of Medicines is issuing to doctors about the prescription of benzodiazepines to children;

(3) whether he will meet the Committee on Safety of Medicines to discuss the increase in benzodiazepine prescriptions in 1987.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The Committee on Safety of Medicines published advice on the prescribing of benzodiazepines in Current Problems No. 21, issued to all doctors in January 1988; a copy is in the Library. Its advice, which is still valid, is directed towards the treatment of all patients and is also summarised in the latest edition of the British National Formulary (BNF) which the Department issues to all doctors. The BNF also warns that hypnotics, the most common of which are benzodiazepines, should rarely be prescribed for children. I have no present plans to meet the Committee or to ask it to issue further advice on this subject.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take following the increase in the number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines dispensed by community pharmacists in 1987.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* Since 1979 the overall trend in the number of prescriptions for benzodiazepines has been downwards. We estimate that in Great Britain, 25·4 and 25·5 million prescriptions were dispensed for benzodiazepines during 1986 and 1987 respectively. These estimates are based on a sample of approximately one in 200 prescriptions dispensed by retail chemists and appliance contractors in England and Wales. For Scotland, the sample is one in 100. The difference between 1986 and 1987 figures is within sampling error and is not statistically significant.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of people put on benzodiazepines during 1988 who have taken them for longer than the period advised by the Committee on Safety of Medicines.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 30 January 1989]:* This information is not collected centrally.

Medicines (Safety)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list all issues of the Committee on Safety of Medicines bulletin entitled "Current Problems" which have been withheld from publication after initial preparation in the last 12 months, giving the reasons in each case;

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure that the Committee on Safety of Medicines is able to issue advice to doctors on Bolvidon.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* Only one article approved for issue by the Committee on Safety of Medicines was withheld from publication in this period. This article entitled "Mianserin and White Blood Cell Disorders in the Elderly" was withheld from Current Problems Bulletin No. 24 (published in January 1989) because of a High Court injunction. An article on this subject was subsequently published in Current Problems No. 25, in March 1989, and sent to all doctors. Bolvidon is referred to in this article since mianserin is its active ingredient.

Optical Equipment (Non-qualified Staff)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about auto refractors and auto optitesters being used by non-qualified optician staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* We have received representations from a number of organisatons and individuals about the use of auto refractors and auto optitesters by non-qualified staff. The Opticians Act 1958 provides that sight tests using such instruments may be conducted only by a registered medical practitioner or a registered ophthalmic optician. We have no plans at present to change this requirement.

BM Test BC Strip

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will consider making BM test BC strip available on prescription; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* I would consider any application from the suppliers for the inclusion of this strip on the list of chemical reagents prescribable by general practitioners. Whether such an application would be successful would depend on the likely level of demand and the price. The strips currently prescribable meet the needs of most diabetics. Other types of strip are available through the hospital service.

Brain Injuries (Rehabilitation)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has made to evaluate the services available within Britain for the rehabilitation of the brain-injured, including the centre for brain injury rehabilitation and development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* I understand that the Centre of Brain Injury Rehabilitation and Development is located in Wales and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has provided funds for an evaluation of the centre. Officials from this Department are considering the scope for sponsoring research related to services in England for those suffering from traumatic brain injury.

Drugs (Safety)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what adverse reports have been received by the Committee on Safety of Medicines about the effect of the drug Bolvidon on patients.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* There are two branded medicinal products containing the active ingredient mianserin; one of these is Bolvidon. To date, the Committee on Safety of Medicines has received just over 1,700 reports of adverse reactions which may be associated with mianserin. These reports describe more than 360 separate reactions. A report of a suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean a causal relationship. The Committee carefully monitors all issues of drug safety, and where necessary, issues advice by means of their bulletin "Current Problems" to doctors, dentists and pharmacists. In the case of mianserin, "Current Problems" has drawn attention to various adverse reactions in December 1981 (No. 7), October 1982 (No. 8) April 1983 (No 10) and March (No. 25). Copies are in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 April 1989

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service Commission

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what plans he has for further changes in the role of the Civil Service Commission.

Mr. Luce: In 1982, the Civil Service Order in Council was changed so as to divide responsibility for recruitment between the Civil Service Commissioners on the one hand and Ministers on the other. The commissioners retained responsibility for the selection of middle and senior level staff—about 15 per cent. of the Civil Service. Departments assumed full responsibility for the majority of recruitment —85 per cent.—subject to certain rules laid down by the Minister for the Civil Service.

In the light of current developments in Civil Service management, including the recent Next Steps initiative, it is now proposed to extend the area of recruitment which is the responsibility of Departments. It is proposed that from 1 April 1991, Departments and agencies should be free to carry out their own recruitment to grades and posts below grade 7, except for fast stream entrants. The Civil Service Commissioners would remain responsible for the recruitment and certification of staff at grade 7 and above —the more senior grades—and of their fast stream feeder entries. Departments and agencies, which will then be responsible for over 95 per cent. of recruitment, will act under rules laid down by the Minister for the Civil Service, which will reflect the principle of selection on merit by fair and open competition. The Civil Service Commissioners will advise the Minister on these rules, and will also be required to monitor, independently, their application by Departments, and to report accordingly. The commissioners will be free to publish their advice and reports.

The commission will continue to make arrangements for recruitment to posts which remain the responsibility of the commissioners, and will support their new advisory and monitoring responsibilities. In addition, the Commission will be prepared to undertake, on repayment, recruitment of other grades on behalf of Departments, agencies and other bodies. A new executive agency will be created within the commission to carry out recruitment functions. Departments and agencies, however, will be free to make alternative arrangements for recruiting staff to the grades for which they are responsible, provided they observe the rules that will be promulgated.

A considerable amount of detailed work remains to prepare for the transfer of responsibilities, to establish the executive agency on a repayment basis, and to make the necessary financial and legislative adjustments. In carrying this forward in the period up to 1991 and beyond, the objective will be to secure a smooth transition. There will be full discussion and consultation as appropriate with all concerned, including the staff of the Commission and their trades union representatives.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is considering the application of the proposed changes to the diplomatic service.

In due course it will be necessary to replace or amend the Civil Service Order in Council and the associated general regulations, to give effect to these proposals.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxes and Benefits

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* up-to-date figures on the same basis as those provided to the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) in the *Official Report*, 10 January, columns *633-56*.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I have arranged for tables giving the information requested to be placed in the Library of the House.

Pay and File

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when it is planned to implement the new system of pay and file for companies, introduced in the Finance (No. 2) Act 1987, and the new interest rules for employers' PAYE deductions, introduced in the Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The implementation of pay and file for companies, and the general interest charge on employers' PAYE deductions delayed beyond the end of the tax year, have to be fitted in with the other major changes in direct taxation which are in hand. When the enabling legislation for these measures was before the House in 1987 and 1988 respectively, Ministers said that on present plans they would not be implemented until 1992 at the earliest. The detailed timetable has been revised since then to take account of new initiatives such as independent taxation.

Under this revised timetable, the starting dates for these two measures will not be until 1993 at the earliest. I cannot be more precise at this stage. Firm starting dates will be announced in due course, and the likely starting date for pay and file will be announced in sufficient time to allow companies and their advisers to complete their preparations for the change. Companies which would, at present, have difficulty in meeting the time limits under pay and file for estimating their tax liability and filing their return, will be able to bring themselves up to date gradually over the period from now up to 1993.

European Economic Interest Groupings

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax rules for European economic interest groupings.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Under the terms of European Council regulation EEC No. 2137/85, European economic interest groupings may be set up. The regulation is directly applicable under Community law throughout the European Community and has effect from 1 July 1989. However, certain articles are not completely self-executing, and in order to make the regulation fully effective in the United Kingdom, domestic legislation will be required. For taxation purposes, EEIGs will be fiscally transparent; profits will be taxable and losses allowable only at the level

of their members. After consultations with interested parties, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer intends to bring forward proposals covering the tax position of EEIGs in the 1990 Finance Bill. However, these will be effective from 1 July 1989.

Other rules, for example on the method of registering EEIGs, which will be needed to make the regulation fully effective in Great Britain will be contained in regulations which my right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry intends to lay before the Houses of Parliament on 19 April 1989.

Income Tax

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether unmarried couples who are living together and are treated for Department of Social Security purposes like married couples will be able to claim married couple's income tax allowance after April 1990.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* No. The married couple's allowance will be given only if the couple are both married and living together. As at present, however, an unmarried couple looking after one or more children will be able to claim an additional personal allowance between them. The additional personal allowance will be equal in amount to the married couple's allowance.

Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to 1989-90 the figures given in reply to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, *Official Report*, 1 December 1988, column *361*, showing net incomes in 1979-80 and 1988-89 at *(a)* two-thirds average earnings, *(b)* average earnings, *(c)* twice average earnings and *(d)* three times average earnings, of single-wage married couples with two children, as percentages of the net incomes at the same earnings level of (i) single people and (ii) two-wage married couples, where the combined wage comes to the specified total and the husband earns two thirds and the wife one third.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The information is in the table.

Net income of one earner married couple with 2 children as a percentage of net income of (a) single person and (b) 2 earner married couple with no children on same level of earnings

(a) As percentage of net income of single person

	Multiples of average earnings[1]			
	Two thirds	*One*	*Two*	*Three*
1979-80	121·9	115·3	108·0	106·7
1988-89	117·4	112·0	107·4	105·4
[2]1989-90	116·2	111·3	107·0	104·9

(b) As percentage of net income of married couple with 2 earners and no children

	Multiples of average earnings[1]			
	Two thirds	*One*	*Two*	*Three*
1979-80	101·9	100·7	103·4	[3]99·3
1988-89	99·8	100·1	102·6	[3]99·7
[2]1989-90	98·8	99·1	101·6	99·0

The amounts of income (£ per week) are as follows:

Net income after income tax, national insurance contributions and child benefit (£ per week)

	Multiples of average earnings[1]			
	Two-thirds	One	Two	Three
	Married couple with one earner and 2 children			
1979-80	65·46	88·60	163·44	226·55
1988-89	145·99	201·89	379·14	531·60
[2]1989-90	158·71	218·79	409·35	573·21
	Single			
1979-80	53·71	76·85	151·30	212·29
1988-89	124·33	180·23	353·18	505·64
[2]1989-90	136·56	196·64	382·61	546·47
	Married couple with 2 earners and no children			
1979-80	64·24	88·02	158·14	[3]228·15
1988-89	146·27	201·62	369·43	533·41
[2]1989-90	160·62	220·69	402·89	579·26

[1] Average earnings are those for full time males working a full week at adult rates in all occupations. They are £109·30 per week in 1979-80 and assumed to be £254·10 in 1988-89, an increase of 8¼ per cent. on average earnings in 1987-88 and £273·10 in 1989-90, and increase of 7½ per cent on 1988-89 (the increases used by the Government Actuary in assessing the level of the National Insurance Fund as described in paragraph 3·02 of the Autumn Statement 1988).

[2] Income tax rates and allowances used for 1989-90 are those proposed in the 1989 Budget. The calculations also assume post-October NIC rates; before October people earning more than £115 per week will pay an additional £3·01 per week.

[3] Corrected from the reply of 1 December 1988.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing the net incomes in 1989-90, after taking into account income tax, national insurance contributions, child benefit and basic state retirement pensions, of a pensioner couple aged 65 to 74 years, a pensioner couple aged over 75 years and a single-earner couple with two children, assuming weekly gross incomes, excluding basic state retirement pension where appropriate, of £100, £150, £200, £250 and £300.

Mr. Lawson *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* Information is given in the tables. The income tax rates and allowances used for 1989-90 are those proposed in the Budget.

Net income after income tax, national insurance contributions and child benefit, 1989-90

Gross income[1] £ per week	*Pensioner couples aged 65-74*	*Pensioner couples aged 75 or over*
169·80	153·24	154·10
219·80	190·67	191·53
269·80	223·38	223·38
319·80	260·88	260·88
369·80	298·38	298·38

[1] Including basic state retirement pension of £69·80 per week paid to the husband.

Gross income £ per week	*One earner married couple with two children[1]*
100	104·54
150	137·54
200	170·54
250	203·54
300	236·54

[1] Assuming post-October rates of NIC, and child benefit of £7·25 per week (per child).

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will detail the United Kingdom aid provided to the Sudan in 1988-89, under the following headings *(a)* food, *(b)* medical supplies, *(c)* transport and *(d)* water supplies-equipment; and if he will give the amounts provided by the United Kingdom for the provinces of Equatoria, Bahr Ghazal and Upper Nile.

Mr. Chris Patten: Final expenditure figures for 1988-89 are not yet available. Provisional figures for Britain's emergency and relief aid to Sudan include the following:

(a) Food: £6·908 million (including the United Kingdom share of European Community food aid).
(b) Medical supplies: £0·173 million.
(c) Transport: £0·169 million.
(d) Water supplies-equipment: £0·040 million.

Of these, about £4·5 million was for the southern provinces of Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal and upper Nile. Figures for the individual provinces are not available.

In addition to emergency and relief aid, our programme of long-term development assistance and programme aid included:

(a) Food production: £1·2 million.
(b) Medical supplies: £2·3 million.
(c) Transport: £2·7 million.
(d) Water supplies-equipment: £2·0 million.

Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Kingdom contributions to each of the member states of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference through multilateral agencies, in each year from 1979 onwards *(a)* in cash and *(b)* in 1988 prices.

Mr. Chris Patten: The information is as follows. Figures for 1987 are not yet available from all multilateral agencies.

United Kingdom
Share of multilateral aid to SADCC countries 1980—1986

£ thousands

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Angola	330	610	520	720	1,900	1,700	1,780
Botswana	840	860	420	460	1,660	910	1,410
Lesotho	960	1,410	1,860	1,850	2,170	1,990	1,370
Malawi	3,410	3,010	3,680	4,010	8,320	3,770	5,460
Mozambique	1,160	1,510	1,310	2,880	4,650	5,390	6,020
Swaziland	1,050	450	560	940	1,290	510	670
Tanzania	5,080	9,690	11,640	10,590	10,770	7,620	9,090
Zambia	2,560	3,350	5,390	2,390	5,730	8,600	5,740
Zimbabwe	2,770	2,220	1,810	2,120	5,420	1,260	1,540
TOTAL	18,160	23,110	27,190	25,960	41,910	31,750	33,080

United Kingdom
Share of multilateral aid to SADCC countries at 1988 prices

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Angola	536	889	704	928	2,337	1,981	2,002
Botswana	1,365	1,254	569	593	2,042	1,060	1,586
Lesotho	1,560	2,056	2,520	2,384	2,670	2,318	1,514
Malawi	5,541	4,389	4,985	5,168	10,235	4,392	6,140
Mozambique	1,885	2,202	1,775	3,720	5,720	6,279	6,770
Swaziland	1,706	656	759	1,211	1,587	594	753
Tanzania	8,254	14,129	15,768	13,648	13,249	8,877	10,222
Zambia	4,160	4,885	7,302	3,080	7,049	10,019	6,455
Zimbabwe	4,501	3,237	2,452	2,732	6,668	1,468	1,732
TOTAL	29,507	33,696	36,833	33,455	51,558	36,989	37,199

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list British contributions to the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference for each year since its foundation.

Mr. Chris Patten: Since the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference was founded, the United Kingdom has committed the following amounts:

£10 million in 1980-81
£2 million in 1982-83
£13 million in 1985-86
£10 million in 1986-87
£10 million in 1987-88
£15 million in 1988-89

Expenditure is recorded within the figures for the country where individual projects are based.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the level of British bilateral aid to each of the member states of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference for each year from 1979 to 1987;

(2) if he will list the level of British bilateral aid to each of the member states of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference for each year from 1979 to 1987 inclusive, at 1987 prices.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, gave her on 13 May 1988 at column 250.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Crosby of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *495*, he will publish a similar table of information about re-entrant teachers for the year ended 31 March 1984;

(2) if, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Crosby of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *496*, he will publish a similar table of qualified teachers returning to employment in maintained secondary schools in the years ended 31 March 1984 and 1985; to what extent in each of 1984, 1985 and 1986 the numbers of teachers identified reflect a return to *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time and *(c)* supply teaching; and if he will make a statement;

(3) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Crosby of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *495*, if he will now publish an analysis by age and sex of the numbers of re-entrant teachers to maintained secondary schools, in each of the years 1984, 1985 and 1986; what further information is available to his Department in relation to the length of time such re-entrant teachers had spent out of service; what further information is available to his Department in relation to re-entry to *(a)* full-time, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* supply teaching, where this can be differentiated by age, sex or length of time out of service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Figures for the years ending March 1984, 1985 and 1986 of re-entrants to teaching in maintained schools in England are as follows:

	Year ending		
	1984	*1985*	*1986*
Re-entrants to maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools by sector			
Re-entrants to nursery and primary schools			
number	6,470	6,890	7,670
as a percentage of all entrants to these schools	65	65	63
Re-entrants to secondary schools			
number	6,380	6,210	6,480
as a percentage of all entrants to these schools	41	45	47
Re-entrants to nursery, primary and secondary schools			
number	12,860	13,100	14,150
as a percentage of all entrants to these schools	50	53	55
Re-entrants to maintained secondary schools by graduate status and degree subject			
Graduate re-entrants	3,250	3,130	3,420
Of which, number whose degree subject is:			
Mathematics	230	200	240
Physics	90	110	110
Other sciences	500	450	530
Geography	210	190	210
Economics and other social sciences	250	250	270
English	530	480	510
History	240	230	280
Modern languages	360	400	420
Other subjects	840	810	850
Non-graduate re-entrants	3,140	3,080	3,070
Re-entrants to maintained secondary schools by sex and age			
Men re-entrants	1,440	1,280	1,280
Of which, number aged:			
less than 30	350	270	230
30-34	390	330	310
35-39	310	290	290
40-44	160	160	180
45-49	100	110	130
50 and over	130	110	140
Women re-entrants	4,950	4,930	5,210
Of which, number aged:			
less than 30	780	610	600
30-34	1,210	1,150	1,150
35-39	1,470	1,590	1,780
40-4	860	890	980
45-49	410	450	410
50 and over	220	240	290

These figures relate to qualified teachers re-entering full-time service. Comprehensive information on re-entry to supply teaching is not held centrally. Information on re-entry to part-time teaching, and on the length of time out of service of those re-entering full-time service, could only be extracted at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Crosby of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *496*, in relation to qualified teachers returning to employment in maintained secondary schools, how many *(a)* full-time, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* supply teachers (i) return to and (ii) leave such employment, in circumstances where they leave for reasons other than retirement; what trends are discernible in the net position between such leavers and all returners in each year; and if he will make a statement;

(2) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Crosby of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *496*, in relation to qualified teachers returning to employment in maintained secondary schools, what comparable information is available to his Department from the database of teacher records, or any other source, in relation to the numbers and degree subjects of teachers leaving employment in maintained secondary schools, in circumstances where they leave for reasons other than retirement; if he will make it his policy to publish comparable analyses of such leavers and all returners in each recent year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Butcher: Figures from the Department's database of teacher records, of full-time teachers in maintained secondary schools in England leaving full-time service in the maintained sector before normal retirement age (60) are given in the table. Also shown are the numbers of re-entrants to full-time service in these schools.

	Year ending in March:		
	1984	*1985*	*1986*
All leavers below normal retirement age	13,350	14,620	15,150
Graduate leavers	7,900	8,880	9,130
Of which, number whose degree subject is:			
Mathematics	620	650	750
Physics	250	280	320
Other sciences	1,240	1,420	1,520
Geography	470	570	540
Economics and other social sciences	660	750	770
English	1,130	1,230	1,210
History	590	670	690
Modern languages	1,030	1,140	1,160
Other subjects	1,910	2,180	2,340

	Year ending in March: 1984	1985	1986
Non graduate leavers	5,450	5,740	5,840
Re-entrants	6,380	6,210	6,480

The figures for leavers below normal retirement age includes teachers retiring early, as well as those leaving for reasons other than retirement. The precise numbers and characteristics of those retiring early can not be readily identified, but their overall number is of the order of 4,000 per year.

All figures relate to qualified teachers leaving or re-entering full-time service. Comprehensive information on departures from and re-entry to supply teaching is not held centrally, while information relating to part-time teaching could only be extracted at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science over each of the 10 years from 1978 to 1988 how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female head-teachers of schools in England have left for the following reasons: *(a)* normal retirement, *(b)* early retirement, specifying the various reasons for this, *(c)* death in service, and *(d)* death within five years of retirement; and how many in each category were from (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools, (iii) special schools and (iv) other schools.

Mr. Butcher: The information requested is provided in the following tables.

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of English primary schools, between 1978 and 1988

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
1978-79					
Male	406	46	28	41	100
Female	112	38	25	1	5
1979-80					
Male	348	46	134	43	84
Female	143	41	99	0	9
1980-81					
Male	343	37	256	35	95
Female	194	25	209	0	5
1981-82					
Male	346	37	426	37	84
Female	259	48	301	11	37
1982-83					
Male	284	50	436	31	64
Female	223	44	296	10	29
1983-84					
Male	264	50	458	31	50
Female	194	56	364	11	17
1984-85					
Male	239	46	416	16	32
Female	140	59	338	6	12
1985-86					
Male	188	69	344	26	14
Female	150	73	323	10	15
1986-87					
Male	155	69	284	21	10
Female	115	84	269	15	9
1987-88					
Male	144	59	193	19	8
Female	108	82	253	7	2
TOTALS					
Male	2,717	509	2,975	300	541
Female	1,638	550	2,477	71	140

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of English secondary schools, between 1978 and 1988

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirity	Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
1978-79					
Male	143	12	18	16	38
Female	18	4	4	0	1
1979-80					
Male	127	15	51	10	30
Female	21	3	12	0	2
1980-81					
Male	99	11	104	10	24
Female	13	4	18	0	0
1981-82					
Male	91	18	132	9	25

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirity	Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
Female	24	4	43	2	4
1982-83					
Male	78	14	164	9	18
Female	19	8	38	1	1
1983-84					
Male	62	18	167	14	12
Female	14	8	44	2	3
1984-85					
Male	62	20	171	8	13
Female	18	4	30	0	2
1985-86					
Male	64	28	191	6	4
Female	17	6	45	0	1
1986-87					
Male	40	18	142	5	2
Female	10	5	37	0	1
1987-88					
Male	47	26	126	9	2
Female	17	4	23	0	0
TOTALS					
Male	813	180	1,264	96	168
Female	171	52	291	5	15

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of English Special schools, between 1978 and 1988.

	Normal Retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Premature	Deaths in Service	Deaths within five years of Retirement
1978-79					
Male	23	5	0	2	6
Female	3	0	2	0	0
1979-80					
Male	28	4	16	5	8
Female	10	7	14	0	0
1980-81					
Male	19	4	18	6	6
Female	8	3	13	0	0
1981-82					
Male	29	7	45	2	19
Female	18	4	30	0	2
1982-83					
Male	19	2	37	4	2
Female	10	2	21	1	0
1983-84					
Male	18	9	32	1	4
Female	14	5	22	2	1
1984-85					
Male	17	0	39	3	4
Female	9	3	29	1	2
1985-86					
Male	17	10	34	2	3
Female	10	3	28	0	0
1986-87					
Male	10	12	28	5	2
Female	10	5	22	1	0

	Normal Retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Premature	Deaths in Service	Deaths within five years of Retirement
1987-88					
Male	12	6	23	2	1
Female	8	3	16	1	0
TOTALS					
Male	192	59	272	32	55
Female	100	35	197	6	5

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of English other schools, between 1978 and 1988

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
1978-79					
Male	41	6	15	2	13
Female	20	8	10	1	2
1979-80					
Male	45	5	20	5	11
Female	23	5	12	0	0
1980-81					
Male	34	11	40	9	5
Female	24	0	34	0	1
1981-82					
Male	40	7	57	6	13
Female	24	7	49	2	7
1982-83					
Male	35	3	47	5	5
Female	26	6	30	0	4
1983-84					
Male	26	8	49	5	8
Female	16	9	42	0	3
1984-85					
Male	31	4	41	2	4
Female	11	6	39	1	3
1985-86					
Male	35	7	65	6	3
Female	19	7	28	2	2
1986-87					
Male	33	9	50	3	1
Female	17	8	29	1	1
1987-88					
Male	19	3	48	4	3
Female	19	8	32	0	0
TOTALS					
Male	339	63	432	47	66
Female	199	64	305	7	23

Tulse Hill School

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how quickly he will come to a conclusion on the application under section 12 of the Education Act for the closure of Tulse Hill school and the amalgamation with William Penn boys school in Red Post hill, London SE24.

Mr. Butcher: The proposals concerning Tulse Hill and William Penn schools are under consideration by my right hon. Friend. On 6 February, the Department wrote to the Inner London education authority and the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark to consult them on a possible modification to the proposals. The responses to that letter are being considered and a decision is expected shortly.

Student Grants

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how he proposes that 1990's student grant will reflect the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Government will take into account all factors affecting students' financial circumstances in setting

the level of the student grant for 1990-91. The community charge will not necessarily lead to an increase in outgoings: students will no longer have to pay domestic rates.

Research Grants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much research money has been granted by the Government to non-United Kingdom universities in each of the last 10 years; and what was the nature of the research for which money was granted in each instance.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Vice-Chancellors

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the annual increase in the average salary of university vice-chancellors in each of the last 10 years, expressed *(a)* in cash terms *(b)* real terms and *(c)* as a percentage of the average rise in non-manual earnings.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not collected.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average cost of tuition fees per student for (i) medical courses, (ii) science courses and (iii) arts courses for each of the last 10 years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms, with 1979 = 100, for (1) undergraduates and (2) postgraduates.

Mr. Jackson: Tuition fees for full-time home and EC students are not differentiated by subject area. The standard maximum tuition fees eligible for reimbursement under the student awards arrangements have been:

	Undergraduates		*Postgraduates*	
	£	[1]*Index*	£	[1]*Index*
1979-80	595	100	890	100
1980-81	740	105	1,105	105
1981-82	900	116	1,320	113
1982-83	480	58	1,413	114
1983-84	480	55	1,494	115
1984-85	500	55	1,569	115
1985-86	520	54	1,632	114
1986-87	536	54	1,680	113
1987-88	556	53	1,730	111
1988-89	578	52	1,800	108

[1] Measured in real terms using the GDP deflator.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total local authority spending on university tuition fee in each of the last 10 years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms, with 1979 = 100, for (i) undergraduates and (ii) postgraduates.

Mr. Jackson: The available data are listed below. The figures represent the total amount local education authorities pay in fees for students in receipt of a mandatory or discretionary award. The indexed figure is based on real terms 1978-79 prices.

LEA expenditure on postgraduate and undergraduate fees[1] 1978-79 to 1986-87—England and Wales

£ million

Year	*Undergraduate*		*Postgraduate*	
	Cash terms	[3]*Real terms*	*Cash terms*	[3]*Real terms*
1978-79	121·1	100	3·0	100
1979-80	136·1	96	3·3	95
1980-81	175·4	105	4·4	106
1981-82	201·0	109	5·3	116
[2]1982-83	121·6	62	2·7	56
1983-84	122·2	59	2·7	53
1984-85	124·3	58	2·8	52
1985-86	130·0	57	2·8	50
1986-87	133·5	57	3·0	51

[1] Excludes sandwich students in placement year.
[2] In 1982-83 the rate of fees set for first degree and diploma courses were reduced from £900 to £480 with compensating increases in direct funds to institutions.
[3] Indexed 1978-79 = 100.

Grant-Maintained Schools Trust

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his reply of 4 April, *Official Report*, column *121*, what steps his Department took on learning that the literature of the grant-maintained schools trust had incorrectly described it as a registered charity.

Mrs. Rumbold: None. The grant-maintained schools trust is an independent body and it was for it to decide what steps to take. The trust was not described as a charity in any document issued by my Department.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, 4 April, *Official Report*, column *121*, when the discussions with the chairman and director of the grant-maintained schools trust were held; and what matters were discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend and I met the chairman and director of the trust in October last year and in February this year. Matters discussed included the number of schools making inquiries to the trust about grant-maintained status and a possible future role for the trust in helping any schools approved for grant-maintained status prepare for their new role.

HM Inspectors

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what was the total establishment of Her Majesty's inspectors of education; and how many were in post, in the years 1979, 1983 and 1988;

(2) how many *(a)* full individual school inspections, *(b)* other individual inspections and *(c)* whole authority inspections were carried out by Her Majesty's inspectors in each of the years 1983 to 1988; and what proportion of the total number of (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools were so inspected by category in each year;

(3) if he will publish a table for each local education authority in England showing the number of inspectors and advisers employed by each authority, and the ratio of that number to the number of the pupils in that authority's area, with national totals and the ratio for England as a whole.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The total complement of Her Majesty's inspectorate, and the numbers of staff in post (including inspectors of further and higher education), were as follows, on 1 January in the year in question:

	1979	*1983*	*1988*
Complement	430	440	485
Staff in post	404	386	477

Inspections which resulted in published reports on individual institutions and whole authorities in the calendar years 1983 to 1987 are listed in the following table. The proportion of schools inspected relative to the total number of schools in England in those years is shown in brackets. Figures for 1988 cannot be provided as a number of reports arising from inspections begun in that year have yet to issue.

	Primary		*Secondary*		*Whole*
	Number	*per cent.*	*Number*	*per cent.*	*authority*
1983	95	(0·5)	88	(2·0)	3
1984	74	(0·4)	76	(1·7)	5
1985	99	(0·5)	83	(1·9)	1
1986	102	(0·5)	68	(1·6)	1
1987	90	(0·5)	59	(1·4)	1

These figures exclude inspections of schools relating to some 300 district and national survey reports which issued over the period in question, and all inspections of youth and community work and further and higher education institutions.

Her Majesty's inspectorate does not undertake "other individual inspections", but makes thousands of visits to schools in the course of its day-to-day business. Estimated figures for the academic years requested are provided in the following table. The proportion of schools visited relative to the total number of schools in England in those years is shown in brackets.

	Primary		*Secondary*	
	Number	*per cent.*	*Number*	*per cent.*
1983-84	3,600	(18)	3,400	(77)
1984-85	3,000	(15)	2,200	(50)
1985-86	3,000	(15)	2,100	(49)
1986-87	3,200	(16)	2,300	(54)
1987-88	3,300	(17)	2,400	(58)

Thus, on average, each secondary school is visited about every two years and each primary school about every five years.

I regret that information in the form requested relating to local authority advisers and inspectors is not collected centrally.

School Governors

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many school governors in the last two years have *(a)* been dismissed, *(b)* resigned and *(c)* had their nomination withdrawn by an appropriate nominating body; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what rights of appeal he provides for school governors *(a)* against dismissal and *(b)* against their nomination being withdrawn; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is for local authorities to decide whom to appoint to the places on school governing bodies reserved for them. It also falls to them to decide whether a governor appointed by them should be removed from office. But they must exercise their powers reasonably, and we would consider very carefully any complaint that an authority had not done so in a particular instance.

Appointing bodies other than local authorities have similar powers. A complaint that such a body has exercised its powers unreasonably may be pursued through the courts. There is no provision for the dismissal of elected or co-opted governors.

Collective Worship

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether his Department will issue guidance to local education authorities setting out a definition of a collective act of worship under the terms of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department's circular 3/89, issued in January this year, contains guidance on the new requirements for religious education and collective worship in schools. It also explains that one of the functions of local standing advisory councils on RE may be to advise LEAs on matters connected with religious worship in schools. Copies of the circular were sent to all local education authorities and schools in England and to other bodies, and a copy has been placed in the Library. The Department does not intend to issue further guidance in this area.

Ethnically Based Statistics

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the result of consultation on the draft circular on the collection of ethnically based statistics on school teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: My Department and the Welsh Office issued a draft circular on the collection of ethnically based statistics on school teachers as a basis for consultation in October 1987. Comments were received from 58 bodies and individuals. The great majority were sympathetic to the principle of such collection. Issues of concern included the classification scheme to be adopted; monitoring of applicants for teaching posts; and timing. In the light of these responses my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have today issued a revised circular. Copies will be placed in the Library. Complete data from all authorities will be required in January 1990. The collection of this data is essential to measure the success of our efforts to secure an increase in the number of school teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Research and Development (Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are the latest figures on distribution for his Department's budget for research and development in Yorkshire.

Mr. Atkins: In 1988-89 my Department's spending on eligible research and development projects in the Yorkshire and Humberside region amounted to £3·75 million. This figure does not include some elements of expenditure which it was not possible to break down on the basis required.

Furniture and Furnishings (Safety)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what discussions in applying Furniture and Furnishing (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 to baby products he or his officials have had with the Baby Products Association; and what steps he has taken to ensure these regulations will be compatible with the need for baby fabrics to allow air to pass through them to ensure a child's breathing is not restricted when the fabric comes into contact with a baby's face, particularly if it gets wet.

Mr. Forth: Officials in my Department discussed the application of the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations with the Baby Products Association and the British Association of Nursery and Pram Retailers on 22 February.

The only padded nursery products where air permeability appears to be a significant factor are pillows and baby nests. The regulations apply to the fillings of pillows but not to their covers. Baby nests are outside the scope of the regulations. There would thus appear to be no conflict between these regulations and the need for permeability in nursery products.

However, I am considering whether babies may be harmed by exposure to fire retardant chemicals likely to be used on the cover fabrics of some nursery products in order to make them match resistant and thereby meet the requirements in the regulations. If the medical advice I am seeking suggests that there may be such a danger, I shall consider amending the regulations in order to provide a limited exemption.

Manufacturing Productivity

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about productivity levels in British manufacturing industry.

Mr. Atkins: In the three months to January 1989, manufacturing productivity, as measured by output per person employed, was at a record level, 6 per cent. higher than a year earlier and 49 per cent. higher than the 1979 average level. During the 1980s, manufacturing productivity in the United Kingdom has grown faster than in all other major industrialised countries.

Internal Market

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for the east midlands area to benefit from the operation of the European internal market from 1992.

Mr. Atkins: The completion of the single market means greater freedom for trade, and many studies have demonstrated the benefits of that. The single market will bring opportunities for business in all parts of the country. DTI is seeking to ensure that business in the east midlands, as in other regions, takes the necessary action to respond effecitively to the opportunities and challenges ahead, and the "Europe open for business" campaign has stimulated great interest throughout the country.

Spirits

Mr. Sims: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received a copy of the representations of the European Community Commission by the European Community Spirits Producers Association to seek the early elimination of the remaining customs duties and frontier taxes levied on European Community spirits in certain EFTA markets; what action his Department has taken to support the United Kingdom spirits industry in achieving the removal of these duties and taxes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has received a copy of the representations to the European Commission by the European Community Spirits Producers Association. The Government strongly support the opening up of the EFTA markets to Community producers, and we shall press the Commission to react positively to the proposals in the association's paper.

Import Quotas

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how quotas imposed on goods imported into the United Kingdom are achieved in circumstances where more than one company wishes to import and their desired total imports would exceed the quota.

Mr. Alan Clark: Except when arrangements are made for the country of origin to administer a quota by dividing it amongst its exporters, quota shares are normally allocated to applicants on the basis of their past trade in the product concerned.

Estate Agents

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received proposals for the regulation of estate agencies from the National Association of Estate Agents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I have received proposals from the National Association of Estate Agents and others on the regulation of estate agents.

I am currently considering whether it might be appropriate to supplement the existing consumer protection provisions of the Estate Agents Act 1979, perhaps with an effective self-regulatory system incorporating a code of practice. I hope to be in a position to announce the conclusion of my review fairly soon.

Timeshare

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received about timeshare mail shots; if he has any plans to seek to make them illegal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I receive a number of complaints about the use of prize-draw mail shots by certain timeshare companies and the Department's leaflet—"Your Place in the Sun"—warns consumers to be particularly wary of such offers.

I have no plans to legislate. The Timeshare Developers Association lays down standards for the kind of

promotions undertaken by its members in its code of ethics. The Advertising Standards Authority considers complaints about promotional material which does not comply with the British Code of Sales Promotion Practice and the Control of Misleading Advertisements Regulations 1988, administered by the Director General of Fair Trading, apply to misleading advertising.

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has received any representations concerning the introduction of a cooling-off period for timeshare buyers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I do receive complaints about some timeshare companies not providing a cooling-off period. It is an important safeguard for consumers, and an increasing number of timeshare companies recognise this. The Timeshare Developers Association's code of ethics requires its members to provide a minimum cooling-off period of five days. The Department's leaflet—"Your Place in the Sun"—advises those interested in timeshare not to sign anything unless a cooling-off period is allowed.

House of Fraser

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on what dates since 1979 he or any of his Ministers have met Mr. Harry Landy to discuss the case for an inquiry into the affairs of the El Fayeds or House of Fraser holdings.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* None.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Public Defender Schemes

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General what inquiry has been made by the Government into the effectiveness of public defender schemes; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Government have not initiated any inquiry into the effectiveness of public defender schemes and have no immediate plans to do so.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sapphire Investigations Bureau

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contracts his Department has placed over the past 10 years with the Sapphire Investigations Bureau.

Mr. Eggar: We have no record of any such contract.

Freedom of Information (Conference)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the British delegation to attend the Helsinki process conference on freedom of information; who drew up the delegation list; and how the list was compiled.

Mr. Waldegrave: Lord Rees-Mogg has accepted my invitation to lead the British delegation to the London Information Forum. Following are the names of the personalities who have accepted his invitation to join the delegation.

They will be supported by Sir Anthony Williams, formerly Her Majesty's ambassador to the Madrid CSCE review conference, and by a small number of officials.

Bruce Anderson—*Sunday Telegraph*
Neal Ascherson—*The Observer*
Jonathan Eyal—Royal United Services Institute
John Grant—EETPU
John Harper—Consultant in telecommunications/IT
Geoffrey Hosking—Professor of Russian History, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London
Paul Johnson—Author
Austen Kark—formerly Managing Director, BBC External Broadcasting
Mrs. Helen Liddell—Maxwell Publications, Scotland
Edwina Moreton—*The Economist*
Dr. Janet Morgan—Director, Cable and Wireless
David Nicholas—Chairman, ITN
David Puttnam—Enigma Productions
Malcolm Rutherford—Assistant Editor, *Financial Times*
Adam Scott—Director, International Affairs, British Telecom
John Vincent—Professor of Modern History, University of Bristol
George Wedell—Professor of Communication Policy, University of Manchester, and Director, European Institute for the Media
Andreas Whittam-Smith, *The Independent*

Diplomatic Service (Women)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many women currently hold the position of ambassador, high commissioner or chargé d'affaires within Her Majesty's diplomatic service.

Mr. Eggar: Six: five ambassadors and one chargée d'affaires.

Fishing Conference (South American States)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what circumstances he sent out invitations to south American states to participate on 16 March in a conference on fishing; how many acceptances he received; and what were the reasons given by those who declined.

Mr. Eggar: Diplomatic missions from countries with vessels licensed in the Falklands fishery, together with others with a regional or general interest in conservation and fishery matters in the south-west Atlantic, were invited to a technical presentation in the FCO on conservation and management aspects of the Falklands fishery on 16 March. The presentation explained and expanded on the Falkland Islands Government's report, published on 9 March, a copy of which is being placed in the Library. Twenty two missions attended; 11 regretted that they were unable to send representatives.

SAAD-16 Contract

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will approach the BBC to obtain a copy of the SAAD-16 contract relating to the export of rocket laboratories to Egypt, Iraq and Argentina.

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes.

Condor Project

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what basis the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) asserted that the Condor 2 missile could start a new arms race.

Mr. Waldegrave: The introduction of missile systems such as Condor 2 into areas of tension and instability risks encouraging other states to obtain similar weapons.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will seek to discuss with the Israeli Government, the involvement of MBB in the Condor project.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the Argentina/Egypt Condor contract.

Mr. Waldegrave: Since the early 1980s, Argentina has been developing a rocket known as Condor 2. Egypt has been linked to the project by Argentine military spokesman and by the press. Officially, however, Egypt denies any involvement.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Governments of Germany, Italy and France on the involvement of their citizens and scientists in the development of Condor 2 missile in Argentina.

Mr. Waldegrave: The possible involvememt of both companies and individuals in various ballistic missile programmes which fall within the parameters of the missile technology control regime is regularly discussed among members of the regime.

Chile

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Chile as to civil rights in that country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have discussed these matters in previous meetings with the Chilean Foreign Minister, and Her Majesty's ambassador in Santiago frequently does so with the Chilean Government. During his visit to Chile in January 1989, and FCO Assistant Under-Secretary of State held talks with Chilean Ministers and senior Government officials, which included the issues of human and civil rights.

TRANSPORT

A6 Bypass

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider the provision of a footbridge over the A6 bypass at Barton-le-Clay, Bedfordshire.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Provision cannot be justified on the basis of known pedestrian/cyclist movements and expected traffic flows.

The situation will be reviewed following completion of the bypass.

Channel Tunnel Link

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the chairman of British Rail on the appropriateness of private Bill procedures for British Rail's proposals for a Channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Portillo: The private Bill procedure is the only procedure available for the promotion of new railway works. Objectors have the opportunity to petition against the Bill to Select Committees of both Houses of Parliament, who have the power to amend the Bill in response to the petitions received. This provides an appropriate mechanism for objections to British Rail's proposals to be considered if they have not been resolved in consultations prior to the Bill's introduction.

M4 Improvements (Berkshire)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions his officials have had with the highways department of Berkshire county council about improving and modernising the road system in the county and about improvements to the London end of the M4; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Officials of the Department and Berkshire county council have discussed the 1989-90 transport supplementary grant and transport capital allocations.

The county council is aware that the national trunk road programme includes schemes for widening the M4 to dual four-lane standard between the M25 interchange and junction 8/9 (Maidenhead) and for improving junction 8/9. We expect to appoint design agents very shortly. The county council will be consulted during the preparation of these schemes.

Rail Link (Channel Tunnel)

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial criteria he instructed the British Railways Board to employ when evaluating a high speed rail link from the Channel tunnel to London; and how these criteria differ from those applied to tunnel-linked road schemes in Kent.

Mr. Portillo: The Government's criteria for approving investment by British Rail were discussed in the Government's observations on the third report of the House of Commons Transport Committee, Session 1986-87, which were published in the first special report of the Committee for the 1987-88 Session (HC420). These observations also addressed the question of comparability with the investment criteria used for new road schemes, and whether the difference in the methods used results in any significant distortion between the modes. Rail and road investments in connection with the Channel tunnel will be appraised using the normal criteria employed for rail and road investments.

Public Transport (Safety)

83. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve safety of the citizens on public transport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: In general, safety standards on public transport are already high; but they must be kept under regular review and steps taken to rectify problems revealed by the investigations into recent accidents. I am taking steps to strengthen the role of the railway inspectorate.

British Transport Police (Report)

84. **Mr. Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive and publish the report on the British Transport police from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary.

Mr. Portillo: The report on the inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary will be made to the British Transport police committee which is responsible for the administration of the force. I understand that HMIC expects to report to the committee later this spring.

Pedestrian Crossings (Auditory Signals)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what co-operation exists between European countries concerning compatibility of auditory signals at pedestrian crossings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In 1984, a survey of the audible signals being used in Europe was undertaken for the European conference of Ministers of Transport. A wide variation in the types of audible signals in use was noted. No standard system was proposed.

The United Kingdom leads a working group of the ECMT on transport and disability. We keep in close touch on a wide range of policy and technical issues in this field.

Three-car Trains (Replacement)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why, in British Rail's provincial sector, many life-expired three-car trains are being replaced by two-car units.

Mr. Portillo: Investment in modern two-car units offering an improved level of service has been approved as the most cost-effective way of replacing old diesel multiple units. Earlier this year I approved a further 194 express vehicles for provincial services.

Traffic Noise

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent tests have been carried out to test the noise level and frequency of traffic passing on *(a)* brushed concrete and *(b)* blacktop; and what has been the result.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Transport and Road Research Laboratory, in its report 896 in 1979 and supplementary report 696 in 1981, published work on the noise and frictional properties of various types of road surface. Peak noise levels from vehicles varied with the texture, depth and type of surface material. Surfaces of equivalent skidding resistance produced similar noise levels. These results were further confirmed in 1987, following further comparisons between brushed concrete and black top surfaces.

M20 (Hollingbourne-Ashford)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what will be the peak hour capacity of the Hollingbourne-Ashford stretch of the M20 when it is completed;

(2) when he estimates peak hour capacity on the Hollingbourne-Ashford stretch of the M20 will be reached.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Motorways are designed for the average daily traffic predicted 15 years after opening. Peak hour flows are just one of the factors taken into account when designing the appropriate carriageway standard.

Average flows of 80,000 to 100,000 vehicles a day are not uncommon on dual three-lane motorways and can be accommodated comfortably. The current forecasts for the Hollingbourne-Ashford section of the M20 in the design year 2005 are 35,000 to 40,000 vehicles a day.

Elderly People (Drivers' Licences)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to require the volunteer drivers of vehicles used by charities to convey elderly and frail people to hospitals and day centres to obtain public service vehicle licences; what is the current position with regard to proposals from the European Community; and what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost of training such drivers to meet public service vehicle licence standards and *(b)* the numbers likely to withdraw from such voluntary activities rather than undertake the necessary training courses.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have no such plans. We consider there is no reason on road safety grounds for doing so. We are pressing the European Commission at every level to avoid placing unnecessary restrictions on volunteer drivers.

We believe that its proposals would have significant social and cost consequences for non-commercial voluntary transport operations, not least because of their deterrent effect on volunteer drivers.

We aim to protect our present arrangements in the negotiations in the Council of Ministers.

Practical driver training for minibus drivers by local authorities and voluntary groups is already widespread. We fully support that.

Settle-Carlisle Railway

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has held with local authorities regarding any proposals to permit privately operated services over the Settle-Carlisle section of British Rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: None. Such consultations are British Rail's responsibility.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the organisations, other than British Rail, with whom he has had discussions about providing railway services on the Settle-Carlisle section of British Rail, during the last eight weeks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend and I have had no such discussions.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his proposal to support a company 51 per cent. owned by British Rail, 49 per cent. owned by Cumbrian Railways Ltd., to operate the Settle-Carlisle section of British Rail.

Mr. Portillo: Negotiations with any private organisations interested in the Settle-Carlisle railway are British Rail's responsibility. However, such negotiations must now be reviewed in the light of my right hon. Friend's answer to the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on 11 April at columns 411-12.

Motorways (Diversions)

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times traffic has been diverted off motorways for each of the last three years in England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This information is not available. The police take decisions on day to day traffic control including when to divert traffic in the event of accidents or other incidents obstructing traffic flow.

ENERGY

Sapphire Investigations Bureau

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what contracts his Department has placed over the past 10 years with the Sapphire investigations bureau.

Mr. Peter Morrison: We have no record of any such contract.

Electricity (Privatised)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to announce the price of shares in the flotation of the various companies which are to be involved in electricity generation and supply; and at what date he expects publicity campaigns in support of these flotations to commence.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No decisions on the pricing of the offers for sale will be announced until just before the time of the sales. Similarly, there will be no expenditure on publicity incurred by the Government in support of the flotations until much nearer the time of the sales.

DEFENCE

Challenger FV Tanks

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of Challenger FV tanks purchased for service with British forces; and what is the total cost of these tanks.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 22 March 1989 at column *616;* the number of Challenger tanks purchased for service with the British forces remains classified.

Helicopters

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of Westland-Augusta EH101 helicopters currently in service with British forces; and what is the number on order and the expected total cost of the order.

Mr. Sainsbury: There are no Anglo-Italian EH101 helicopters currently in service with the British armed forces. The EH101 project is still in its development phase, and production orders are yet to be placed.

Exercise Mallet Blow

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any aircraft taking part in Exercise Mallet Blow was authorised to cause a sonic boom over inhabited areas of Northumberland on Tuesday, 4 April; whether any aircraft did so; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Pilots (Discipline)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military pilots have been subject to disciplinary proceedings for breaches of the regulations concerning the height and speed of flights over the United Kingdom during the past two years.

Mr. Neubert: One military pilot has been subject to formal disciplinary proceedings for breach of the regulations concerning the height of flights during the past two years. This was a Royal Air Force pilot who was charged with unlawful low flying. Less severe infringements of low flying regulations, which have provisions covering both the height and speed of low level flights, are dealt with by informal procedures.

Nuclear Material (Imports)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the 1958 Anglo-American mutual defence agreement on atomic energy matters was last amended; when nuclear material was last imported from the United States under this agreement; in what quality; and in what quantity.

Mr. Sainsbury: The United Kingdom/United States bilateral agreement for co-operation on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defence purposes was last amended in 1984. Details of times of delivery, quantity and quality of materials are classified and, in the national interest, must remain so.

Sapphire Investigation Bureau

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts his Department has placed over the past 10 years with the Sapphire investigation bureau.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have no record of any headquarters contract having been placed with a company of this name during the past 10 years.

Sea Mammals

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent his Department has used or is using or training sea mammals for any purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Sea mammals are not used or trained for any purpose, and there is no record of their use in the recent past.

Nuclear Submarines

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many accidents *(a)* at sea or *(b)* in dock, involving Royal Navy nuclear powered submarines, involved (i) the death of submariners, (ii) the deaths of Royal Naval port workers, or (iii) the release of radioactivity.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since 1980, one accident involving a Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarine has resulted in the death (by drowning at sea) of a naval rating. There were no such accidents involving deaths of workers in Royal dockyards. Details of any accidents before 1980 could not be provided without disproportionate effort and cost. No Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarine has ever been involved in an accident involving a radiological hazard to service men, base personnel or members of the public.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance from the Royal Navy or other North Atlantic Treaty Organisation forces has been offered to the Soviet Union in the rescue or recovery of the nuclear powered submarine lost off the north Norwegian coast on 7 April.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No request for assistance from Her Majesty's forces has been made. In response to any such request, we would lend whatever support we could. Any discussions between the Soviet Union and other NATO countries are a matter for those countries. I understand, however, that an offer of assistance from Norway was declined.

Greenham Common

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has discussed the future of Royal Air Force, Greenham Common with representatives of the United States Air Force; and whether there have been any talks with any official organisation with responsibilities for civil aviation about possible uses for the base, after the cruise missiles are withdrawn.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: RAF Greenham Common has been designated as a stand-by operating base for many years and we envisage that this role will continue after the cruise missiles have been withdrawn. No decisions have yet been taken on possible additional roles thereafter, but we envisage that the base will remain available to the United States authorities for military use. There have been no discussions with any official organisation with responsibilities for civil aviation about possible future uses of the base.

Condor Missile

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the threat posed to the Falkland Islands by development of the Condor missile.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are concerned about the potential destabilising effect which Condor could have in any area of the world where it might eventually be deployed. As far as the threat to the Falkland Islands is concerned, we keep this constantly under review. At its present stage of development, Condor appears to lack the accuracy to pose a realistic military threat, and it would be politically counter-productive for Argentina to threaten to use it against the Falklands. If she were ill-advised enough to do so, we are confident that it would not prevent reinforcement of the islands.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of *(a)* chemical and *(b)* high explosive warheads for the Condor 2 missile.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In principle, both high explosive and chemical warheads could be developed for a missile of this type. Any step in the direction of developing a chemical warhead would of course be a serious further enhancement of Condor's destabilising potential.

PRIME MINISTER

Mountain Ash

Q12. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to visit Mountain Ash.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Crime

Q14. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the fight against crime.

Q105. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the fight against crime.

Q131. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the fight against crime.

The Prime Minister: I receive a range of representations about crime and the Government's action to combat it.

Environment

Q22. **Mr. Malins:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding improvements to the environment.

Q44. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding improvements to the environment.

Q124. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding improvements to the environment.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations, many of which echo this Government's concern to maintain and improve environmental standards.

Free Trade

Q80. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the importance of free trade.

Q99. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the importance of free trade.

Q128. **Mr. Marland:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has received regarding the importance of free trade.

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to note an increasing body of opinion supporting liberal trade policies, to which the Government are committed, both in relation to the European single market and to the GATT Uruguay round. It is encouraging that a firm basis has now been laid for the completion of the GATT Uruguay round negotiations.

Tropical Hardwoods

Q151. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what action she is taking to control the importing of tropical hardwoods.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend the Minister for Trade has had useful and constructive discussion with Dr. Freezailah, executive director of the International Tropical Timber Organisation, in which he has strongly emphasised the importance we attach to ensuring that trade in these products is conducted in a manner consistent with the needs of conservation.

Ozone Layer

Q164. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will take the initiative in organising an international conference on the dangers to the world of climatological flip resulting in another ice age, as a consequence of destruction of rain forest, along the lines of the conference on the ozone layer; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The whole question of climate change, including the impact of rain forest destruction, is being reviewed by the inter-governmental panel on climate change set up under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme and is fully supported by the Government. They will assess the scientific information available, and likely impacts of climate change, and possible policy responses and will report to the second world climate conference in 1990. I do not propose to organise an international ministerial conference at this stage.

Bilton, Rugby

Q166. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to make an official visit to Bilton near Rugby.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Consultants and Special Advisers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the amount spent by her office on outside consultants and special advisers attached to, or working for, No. 10 Downing street in 1988-89.

The Prime Minister: There has been no expenditure by my office on fees on outside consultants in 1988-89. The latest estimate of the amount spent by my office on advisers in 1988-89 is £261,600.

10 Downing Street and Chequers (Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will provide the final figure for 1988-89 for *(a)* the cost of maintaining and running 10 Downing street and additional cost at Chequers, *(b)* the grant in aid to the Chequers Trust and *(c)* the costs on a consistent basis and expressed at constant 1984-85 prices.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1988-89 are not available. The latest estimates of the figures requested are:

	£
(a) cost of maintaining and running 10 Downing street and additional costs at Chequers[1 2 3]	6,262,672
(b) grant-in-aid to Chequers Trust	238,000
(c) figures at *(a)* and *(b)* in 1984-85 price terms	*(a)* 5,099,888
	(b) 193,810

[1] The figures include costs at both 10 Downing street and Chequers; the information is not available by location.

[2] Salaries and wages, notional pension liability, administration costs, the costs of office services and the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust are included. The salary of the Prime Minister is excluded.

[3] This total is calculated on a consistent basis with the total for 1986-87 in sub-paragraph *(a)* of the reply to the hon. Member on 23 October 1987 at column *846*. If office services costs are excluded (to produce a figure consistent with those at sub-paragraph *(c)* of that reply) the total for 1988-89 is £5,756,942. (£4,688,056 at 1984-85 prices).

Disabled Staff

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the staff complement of No. 10 Downing street in 1988-89; and how many staff were registered disabled.

The Prime Minister: The total staff complement of 10 Downing street in 1988-89 was 67. None was registered disabled.

Official Entertainment

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost of official entertainment associated with the office of Prime Minister in 1988-89.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1988-89 are not yet available. The latest estimate of the total cost is £21,979.

Costs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to public funds of all her offices, duties, accommodation and expenses in the year 1988-89.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1988-89 are not yet available. The latest estimate of the total cost of all my offices in 1988-89 is £6,297,151.

(Note.—Salaries and wages, notional pension liability, administration costs, and the grant in aid to the Chequers Trust are included. My salary as a Cabinet Minister is also included. My pay and allowances as a Member of this House are excluded.)

Overseas Visits (Media Representatives)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how much is currently outstanding from media organisations for charges arising from their representatives who accompanied her on official transport on overseas visits; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 10 January 1989 at column 495.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how many journalists accompanied her on her recent visit to various African countries using official transport; and what was the charge per capita.

The Prime Minister: Twenty-three representatives of the media travelled with me. The per capita charge was £1,700.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will give the names and the organisations of those media representatives who accompanied her on official transport during her recent visit to various African countries.

The Prime Minister: A wide range of media representatives accompanied me on my visit.

Appointments (Women)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how many women she has appointed to public bodies since 1979: and what percentage this represents of total appointments for which she is responsible.

The Prime Minister: I have appointed or reappointed 65 women to public bodies since 1979. This represents 14 per cent. of such appointments since that date for which I have been responsible.

African Visit

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will provide a breakdown by category of the cost to public funds of her recent visit to various countries in Africa.

The Prime Minister: The estimate of the cost of this visit, which I gave the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 7 April 1989, can be broken down as follows: travel costs £41,000; other costs £25,000.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what functions were carried out by each of the 11 accompanying officials on her recent visit to Africa; what was her method of travel; and who was the carrier.

The Prime Minister: I travelled to Africa in an RAF VC10. As regards the functions carried out by those accompanying me, I have nothing to add to the answers I gave the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 7 April at column 303.

Official Gifts

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister how much was expended from public funds for the provision of official gifts by her office in 1988-89.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1988-89 are not yet available. The latest estimate of expenditure by my office on official gifts in 1988-89 is £13,653.

Travel (Costs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total cost to public funds of travel by her and accompanying officials in 1988-89.

The Prime Minister: Final figures for 1988-89 are not yet available and cannot be provided in the precise form requested. The latest estimate of the total cost of my travel and that of my staff in 1988-89 is £902,952.

Civil Service Relocation (Clwyd)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will meet Alyn and Deeside district council at its Hawarden headquarters to discuss the relocation of civil service departments in the county of Clwyd and specifically at *(a)* St. David's business park, Ewloe, on the A55 and A483 and *(b)* Warren Hall business park, Broughton, near Chester, on the A55;

(2) if she will visit the Warren Hall and St. David's business parks to see construction work in progress and to assess the suitability of these landscaped sites for the relocation of Whitehall Civil Service departments; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so. Under the policy announced by my right hon. Friend the Paymaster General on 31 March 1988 at columns 610-11, it is for individual Departments to review the location of their work in accordance with clear guidelines with a view to finding locations which offer advantages in terms of recruitment and retention of staff, value for money and increased operational efficiency; and to make their own inquiries about the most suitable sites. When Departments decide to relocate some of their work they will include among the locations they consider areas, such as the hon. Member's constituency, which are the focus of the Government's regional and urban policies. Departmental Ministers will announce their own decisions on significant relocations, including their chosen venues.

Torness power station

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Torness power station.

The Prime Minister: I hope to visit Torness power station in the course of the year.

Secretary of State for Wales (Speech)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if the speech made on 10 April by the Secretary of State for Wales on the economy was totally in accordance with the Government's policy; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The policies being pursued in Wales by the present Secretary of State, as with his distinguished predecessor, are those of the Government as a whole.

Non-oil Balance of Payments

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister what policy proposals she has to tackle the adverse non-oil balance of payments.

The Prime Minister: The rise in the non-oil current account deficit has primarily reflected the strength of domestic demand. The Government have responded appropriately by tightening monetary policy and the effects of this are already apparent—for example in recent figures for MO, retail sales and the housing market.

Wales TUC

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will meet the Wales Trades Union Congress in Cardiff to discuss the needs of Wales's industrial infrastructure;

(2) if she will meet the Wales Trade Union Congress in Cardiff to discuss Her Majesty's Government's industrial and regional policy; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Under this Government, the economy of Wales has been revitalised: economic performance continues to improve; output is growing; and unemployment if falling.

Since 1987, Wales has attracted inward investment of nearly £1,450 million; grants for regional industrial assistance total some £255 million, with an associated forecast of 68,000 new jobs. Seasonally adjusted unemployment has fallen for 34 consecutive months and by some 52,000 in the last two years. The Welsh Development Agency continues to maintain a high level of factory lettings with 2·3 million sq ft in 1988, the best year yet. Since 1979-80, over £1 billion has been spent on roads in Wales. Future plans are described in "Roads in Wales 1989" published on April 10 1989.

I see no need to meet the Wales TUC.

Engagements

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 13 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has had from *(a)* the Confederation of British Industry and *(b)* the Small Businesses Association to his criticisms of their submissions on the poll tax and business rate to hon. Members.

Mr. Gummer: None.

Air Pollution

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to reduce air pollution from airliners flying into Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted; and what powers are available to him to improve limits on the amount of aviation fuel airliners are enabled to jettison over land.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have been asked to reply.

The Government introduced regulations in May 1986 to limit smoke emissions from aircraft. Regulations to limit the emission of unburned hydrocarbons came into effect in January 1989. These cover all airlines using United Kingdom airports. The United Kingdom is playing a full part in international discussions as to what further steps may be required.

The Air Navigation Order 1985, made under the Civil Aviation Act 1982, prohibits the jettisoning of fuel by aircraft over the United Kingdom, except in an emergency. In such an event air traffic controllers will recommend that the fuel be dumped over the sea if at all possible, or in excess of 10,000 ft above ground level, when the fuel would vaporise in the slipstream.

Personal Data

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will amend the next edition of the booklet, "You and the Community Charge", to inform community charge payers that *(a)* the Secretary of State for Social Security can breach a duty of confidentiality in disclosing information to community charge officers and *(b)* the electoral registrar can take a copy of the community charge register and subsequently sell their names and addresses without their knowledge or consent.

Mr. Gummer: No, since neither is true. Regulations will specifically empower my right hon. Friend to pass information to registration officers without breaching any duty of confidentiality. Electoral registration officers may inspect community charges registers, but they have no power to copy and sell them.

Water Authorities (Advertising)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, for each of the 10 national water authorities, how much has been spent to date on advertising purposes in respect of the water industry and its image; what is the expected planned total expenditure for each water authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: This is a matter for the water authorities.

Radon Gas

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by year for the last 10 years the allocation of resources for programmes of radiological protection *(a)* from nuclear reprocessing plants and *(b)* from indoor exposure to radon; what additional research and resources are being planned to reduce exposure from indoor radon gas; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information in the form requested is not readily available. Expenditure figures for the Department over the past two years and planned expenditure for this financial year are as follows:

£ thousand

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Radiation monitoring programmes and associated research in respect of the Sellafield plant	480	532	340
Radon research and surveys	210	250	300

In addition, the Department will contribute to local authority costs in providing home improvement grants for radon remedial work.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations to date he has received from residents living in or near Doncaster metropolitan borough concerning the proposed toxic waste site application by Leigh Environmental at Kirk Sandell; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. Friend has received 16 such representations. It would not be proper for me to comment on this proposal as the application could come before the Secretary of State for decision.

Sports Clubs (Rate Relief)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to provide rate relief for sports clubs similar to that provided in Scotland.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. We propose to ensure that authorities are accountable for their decisions to grant discretionary relief to non-profit-making sports clubs by requiring their community charge payers to bear a proportion of the cost.

Housing Act 1988

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many organisations have applied to the Housing Corporation to become approved landlords under the provisions of the Housing Act 1988 in the categories of *(a)* private landlords, *(b)* housing associations, *(c)* registered housing co-operatives, *(d)* trusts and *(e)* other categories; and if he will list them.

Mr. Trippier: I have asked the corporation to reply to the hon. Member.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made in reviving the private rented sector of housing since the Housing Act 1988 came into force.

Mr. Trippier: The measures contained in part I of the Housing Act 1988 have been in force for less than three months, and it is therefore too soon to draw any firm conclusions as to their impact. Nevertheless, the initial response is encouraging. Recent research suggests that many owners of empty property regard the freedom to charge a market rent as a powerful incentive to let, and that a number of existing landlords are already expanding their rented property portfolios. It is further estimated tht over £300 million has so far been raised under the business expansion scheme which provides generous tax relief for those investing in property to be let on assured tenancies. We shall carry out detailed evaluations of their impact in due course.

Loughborough and Angell Town Estates

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the combined total cost of moneys paid to consultants and the cost to his Department in relation to proposed housing action trusts for the Loughborough and Angell Town estates.

Mr. Trippier: We expect that the costs in relation to the proposed Lambeth housing action trust will amount to less than £185,000. including VAT, when all bills have been paid. This figure covers consultants' fees and the costs of producing reports and leaflets about the proposals.

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has received of the cost of the rehabilitation of Angell Town and Loughborough estates from his consultants on housing action trusts.

Mr. Trippier: The consultants produced an illustrative scheme for costing purposes which estimated the costs of improving the housing action trust area at between £54 million and £93 million approximately for Loughborough estate, and £39 million for Angell Town. Local residents will now be consulted about the proposals for their estates.

Right-to-Buy Legislation

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects council tenants to be able to benefit from the proposed increase in the maximum discount under the right-to-buy legislation.

Mr. Trippier: The maximum discount allowable in right-to-buy sales was increased to £50,000 by the Housing (Right to Buy) (Maximum Discount) Order 1989 which came into effect on 11 April. The increased limit applies to all right-to-buy sales in England and Wales completed from that date.

Housing (EC)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals have been made by the EEC Commission about housing rents and housing costs.

Mr. Trippier: I am not aware of any such proposals.

Insulation

Sir Michael McNair Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 4 April to the hon. Member for Newbury, what are his reasons for not making inspection of loft roof, cavity wall and under floor insulation statutory requirements.

Mr. Trippier: The building regulations already require reasonable precautions to be taken to prevent toxic fumes from cavity insulation materials from permeating into the building. It is the statutory function of the relevant local authority to enforce this requirement. There are no similar requirements about how loft roof and under floor insulation work is carried out, because these operations are not thought to pose potential risks to the health and safety of subsequent users of the building. There are however requirements in the regulations relating to the thermal insulation of the exposed fabric of the building, and the enforcement of these requirements may involve the building control officer in the inspection of loft roof and underfloor insulation work.

Housing and Business Development (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he is giving to the London boroughs on the fringes of central London as to the priority they should give to housing and business development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend's guidance proposes that the boroughs surrounding the City of London should make every effort to accommodate business development within the broader planning objectives for their areas. Boroughs may adopt policies to retain sites and buildings in residential use, but in so doing they should demonstrate that they have made reasonable provision to accommodate demand for business development within their area.

New Dwellings (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he proposes to ensure the provision of an extra 260,000 dwellings in London between 1987 and 2001.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend accepted the figure of 260,000 extra dwellings on the advice of the London Planning Advisory Committee, with the agreement of the boroughs. It is for the boroughs to make provision in their unitary development plans.

Shop Floorspace

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what analysis he has carried out to estimate the need for additional shopping floorspace in London up to 2001; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department has not made such estimates. It is not the Government's policy to attempt to regulate volume changes in supply and demand for retail services. Guidance on how boroughs should take account of the implications of retail forecasts in their UDPs is given in PPG 6.

Retail Services (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for the future of retailing services in central London.

Mr. Trippier: None.

London Docklands

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure compliance of the London Docklands Development Corporation with his draft planning guidance.

Mr. Chope: The London boroughs will produce unitary development plans in line with the Secretary of State's guidance. LDDC will be required to have regard to these plans in exercising its planning powers.

Public Expenditure Estimates

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures have been used in the relevant public expenditure estimates for the utilisation of non-prescribed capital receipts by local authorities in their housing capital expenditure in the years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 tabulated separately for district councils and metropolitan authorities, excluding London boroughs, inner London boroughs, and outer London boroughs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The estimates of local authority non-prescribed capital expenditure used in public expenditure plans are made on a national basis and are not broken down by source of finance, by service, or by class of authority. The estimates of non-prescribed expenditure used in determining the total of capital allocations for England consistent with public expenditure plans for 1987-88, 1988-89, 1989-90 are given:

	£ million
1987-88	430
1988-89	725
1989-90	850

Housing Stock

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what average percentage of the total housing stock of *(a)* councils, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private landlords was vacant at the last recorded date.

Mr. Chope: The information as reported by English local authorities in their housing investment programme returns for 1988 is as follows:

	Vacant dwellings as a percentage of stock
Local authorities[1]	2·4
Housing associations	2·5
Private[2]	4·1

[1] Includes dwellings which are closed or have been acquired for demolition and dwellings on overspill estates.
[2] Includes owner-occupied as well as private rented dwellings.

Rents

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the average percentage of the net rent roll uncollected by *(a)* councils and *(b)* housing associations for the last recorded period.

Mr. Trippier: English local authorities reported cumulative rent arrears (including arrears of former tenants) of £226 million at 1 April 1988: equivalent to 5·7 per cent. of rents collectable for 1987-88.

Information on rent arrears in respect of housing associations is available in chapter 5 of a report by the centre for housing research, university of Glasgow titled "The Nature and Effectiveness of Housing Management in England", a copy of which is in the Library.

Housing Repairs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the comparative costs of the repairs service for tenants of *(a)* housing associations and *(b)* councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Information on the repairs services provided by housing associations and local authorities, including data on comparative costs, is contained in section 6 of "The Nature and Effectiveness of Housing Management in England", by the centre for housing research, university of Glasgow. Copies of the report, which was published earlier this year, are available in the Library.

Housing Associations

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the Housing Corporation assesses the management performance of housing associations.

Mr. Trippier: Under part I of the Housing Associations Act 1985, the securing of proper management in the affairs of registered housing associations is the responsibility of the Housing Corporation. I am therefore arranging for the corporation to write to the hon. Member.

Development Plans

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what levels of new business floorspace and new industrial floorspace he is advising each borough should plan for in their unitary development plans for the year 2001.

Mr. Chope: It is for each borough to draw up its unitary development plan having regard to strategic guidance. The extent of new business and industrial floorspace is primarily an issue for individual boroughs.

Planning Guidance (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of public and private resources required to fulfill the policies and proposals within his planning guidance for London.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has taken account of the resource implications of the policies proposed in the draft guidance. The guidance will set the framework for the preparation of unitary development plans. In preparing these, the boroughs are required to have regard to the resources likely to be available to ensure that their policies are realistic.

Population

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what population level for Greater London in 2001 will result from the policies and proposals in his strategic guidance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: It is not possible at this stage to predict what the population of London will be in 2001.

King's Head Meadow Pipeline

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to inform Chelmsford borough council of his decision on the King's Head Meadow pipeline scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department wrote to Chelmsford borough council on 21 February 1989 inviting a fresh application under the in-and-out scheme because the information contained in the original application had been made invalid by my right hon. Friend's decision on the associated compulsory purchase order. A revised application with up-to-date details was received by the Department on 10 April. A decision on this application will be made as soon as possible.

Defective Homes

Mr. Jack Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the formula that was used to allocate to individual authorities the £15 million package for repairs to defective homes.

Mr. Trippier: As in previous years, the £15 million set aside for 1989-90 to help authorities meet their housing defects obligations was first divided between regions in proportion to the number of owners still eligible for assistance as at 1 April 1988. We then looked at the circumstances of individual authorities, and the proposals that they put forward.

Drinking Water

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what methods are being considered by water authorities to monitor drinking water supply for the presence of waterborne parasitic protozoa such as cryptosporidium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Department's standing committee of analysts initiated work during 1988 on the development of methods for isolating, identifying and quantifying cryptosporidium in water supplies. These methods which have now been tested and other methods for similar waterborne parasitic protozoa are well advanced. When finalised they will be published by HMSO. The need for and form of monitoring by water undertakers for cryptosporidium in water supplies will be considered by the expert group being chaired by Sir John Badenoch which was announced in my reply of 2 March at column *286*.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals exist for joint research projects with water authorities to examine risks posed by cryptosporidium in public water supplies.

Mr. Howard: The need for research projects is being examined by the group of experts established by the Government under the chairmanship of Sir John Badenoch to advise on cryptosporidia in water supplies. I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 2 March 1989 to my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan) at column *286*.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a decision on the application for a research grant by Thames Water and the Robens Institute in relation to work on the parasitic protozoa cryptosporidium in the water supply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Neither Thames Water Authority nor the Robens Institute has applied to the Department for a research grant in relation to work on cryptosporidia in water supplies.

Sports Council (Chairmanship)

Mr. Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make an announcement about the chairmanship of the Sports Council.

Mr. Moynihan: I have today written to Peter Yarranton appointing him to the chairmanship of the Sports Council

for a three-year period commencing from 20 May 1989. I am delighted that Mr. Yarranton has accepted my invitation to become chairman and am sure that his many years of experience in the sporting world eminently qualify him for the task. I should like to thank John Smith, the outgoing chairman, for the valuable contribution that he has made to the work of the council over the past nine years. I know that this has been greatly appreciated by both members and staff of the council and by everyone involved in sport.

Sebastian Coe, who has been a member of the council since November 1983 and a vice-chairman since July 1986, has decided to resign from the council at the end of April to concentrate on a career in broadcasting. His international standing in the world of sport has been particularly valuable to the council and I am very grateful to him for the commitment he has shown throughout his appointment.

I have also written today to Trevor Brooking to appoint him as a member of the Sports Council with effect from 20 May 1989. Mr. Brooking will bring to the council experience not only from his footballing career but also from his chairmanship of the Eastern Regional Council for Sport and Recreation and his more recent business career.

Amazonia

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the statement made on 13 March, *Official Report*, column 168, to which general circulation models on climate the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) was referring, pertaining to Amazonia, which do not allow us to predict regional change with certainty; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The statement made by my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) is true of all the general circulation models currently in use in the major climate change research centres of the world, including the Meteorological Office and various institutions in the United States. Developing the ability to make regional climate change prediction within reasonable limits of confidence is a principal research objective of general circulation modelling. The current status of research on this, and the possibilities for progress, are among the topics being reviewed by working group I of the UNEP/WMO intergovernmental panel on climate change, chaired by Dr. John Houghton of the Meteorological Office.

Forestry Commission (Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the Forestry Commission's planting operations in 1987-88 for the three counties of Yorkshire, in terms of *(a)* direct costs of the planting in the year and *(b)* supervisory costs and overheads related to that planting.

Mr. Ryder: I have been asked to reply. The information is as follows:

£ thousands

	New planting	*Restocking*
Direct (forest) costs	40	217
Supervisory costs and Overheads	16	89
Total costs	56	306

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what areas of land the Forestry Commission proposed to newly plant in the year 1988-89 in the three counties of Yorkshire; and if he will list, by Forestry Commission conservancies, the total area to be planted and the names and locations of the blocks over 100 hectares.

Mr. Ryder: I have been asked to reply.

The Forestry Commission's North England Conservancy carried out a total of 31 hectares of new planting in Yorkshire in the year ended 31 March 1989.

NORTHERN IRELAND

"Harmony"

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *517*, he will publish in the *Official Report* a breakdown of all the costs borne by the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) of the recording of the song "Harmony" at the Giant's Causeway on Friday 10 March.

Dr. Mawhinney: A breakdown should be available shortly and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Head Teachers

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland over each of the 10 years from 1978 to 1988 how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female head teachers of schools in Northern Ireland have left for the following reasons *(a)* normal retirement, *(b)* early retirement, specifying the various reasons for this, *(c)* death in service, and *(d)* death within five years of retirement; and how many in each category were from (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools, (iii) special schools and (iv) other schools.

Dr. Mawhinney: Information on deaths within five years of retirement for the 10-year period, and on retirements for the years before 1987, is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Available information for 1987 and 1988 is set out in the table.

		Primary	*Secondary*	*Special*	*Other (Nursery)*	*Total*
1987						
Age retirements	Male	1	3	—	—	4
	Female	4	—	—	—	4
Early retirements						
Redundancy	Male	1	—	—	—	1

		Primary	Secondary	Special	Other (Nursery)	Total
	Female	—	—	—	—	—
Efficient discharge	Male	2	1	—	—	3
	Female	—	2	—	—	2
Ill health	Male	3	—	—	—	3
	Female	—	—	—	—	—
Death in service	Male	1	—	—	—	1
	Female	—	—	—	—	—
1988						
Age retirements	Male	17	7	—	—	24
	Female	11	2	—	1	14
Early retirements						
Redundancy	Male	4	5	—	—	9
	Female	1	1	—	—	2
Efficient discharge	Male	9	5	—	—	14
	Female	3	—	—	2	5
Ill health	Male	1	—	—	—	1
	Female	—	1	—	—	1
Death in service	Male	1	—	—	—	1
	Female	—	—	—	—	—

Obstetrics and Gynaecology

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the present obstetrics and gynaecological facilities available in the Eastern health board area carried out in accordance with other than Roman Catholic teachings; and what are his future proposals for these services in the Eastern health and social services board area.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 4 April 1989]:* The information requested is as follows.

Available beds for obstetrics and gynaecology in the Eastern health and social services board are:

	Gynaecology	Obstetrics
Ulster hospital	37	45
Mater hospital	15	24
Royal Victoria hospital	32	—
Royal Maternity hospital	—	95
Belfast City hospital	38	68
Downe/Down Maternity	14	24
Lagan Valley hospital	29	45
Bangor hospital	16	—
Ards hospital	26	26

Under the terms of the lease by which the Mater hospital is leased by the trustees to the Department of Health and Social Services the teaching and practice of medicine, the provision of specialist services and nursing are to be carried out in accordance with Roman Catholic moral and ethical principles.

The Eastern board is currently considering recommendations relating to the provision of obstetric and gynaecological services in the Belfast area, which arose from the recent complementarity study. When the board reaches conclusions, I shall wish to discuss their implications with the chairman of the board before any final decisions are taken.

WALES

Deeside Waterfront Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the Deeside waterfront scheme; if he will visit and meet Alyn and Deeside district council to discuss the waterfront project; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I shall reply to the hon. gentleman as soon as possible.

Civil Service Relocation (Clwyd)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit the St. David's business park, Ewloe, and Warren Hall business park, Broughton, to observe construction work and landscaping; if he will meet Alyn and Deeside district council at its Hawarden headquarters to discuss the suitability of the two business parks for the relocation of Whitehall Departments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have regular discussions with the hon. Gentleman and met representatives of Alyn and Deeside district council as recently as 20 March. In addition, I have made numerous visits to north-east Wales. I therefore know the constituency well—and its attractions—and he can be assured that the council would be contacted immediately if any Government Department expressed a particular interest in relocating to Alyn and Deeside. Under the relocation guidelines, it is for individual departmental Ministers to decide whether to proceed with relocation and, if so, to where.

Elderly People

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to provide additional services in Wales for the benefit of the elderly.

Mr. Grist: The provision of services for the elderly is for local and health authorities to decide in the light of their own local circumstances.

Nonetheless in recognition of the rise in the elderly population and changes in the pattern of services for the elderly the local authority capital allocation for social services in 1989-90 has been increased by 15 per cent. over that for the previous year.

In addition central funding continues under the elderly initiative, urban programme and health/local authority joint finance.

Roads

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to invest further sums in the roads systems of Wales additional to that outlined in his White Paper, "Roads in Wales"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: "Roads in Wales 1989" sets out the intentions for road improvements for the future.

Provision for implementing the programme has been set out in the Welsh commentary on the public expenditure White Paper.

Public Transport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to direct investment to public transport systems in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Investment in public transport systems is a matter for public transport operators, in association where appropriate with local authorities.

Industrial Investment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to improve investment in the industrial infrastructure of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Over the last two years I have secured a substantial increase of over 50 per cent. in new resources for my industry programme, and planned net spending in this sector over the next two financial years will contribute a further £410 million to the industrial regeneration of Wales. This figures rises to over £530 million when account is taken of the gross spend planned for the development agencies in Cm 617. My industry resources are complemented directly by the £152 million to be invested this year alone on the key motorway and trunk road network as described in "Roads in Wales 1989". Future years' provision for all my programmes will be reviewed periodically in the normal way.

Railway Electrification

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss any proposals for the electrification of the Crewe-Holyhead, Swansea-Paddington railway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Regular meetings are held with the Chairman to discuss a range of issues; the electrification of these lines is a matter for British Rail.

Health Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to allocate additional cash to improve the Health Service in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I announced on the 21 December 1988 that, subject to parliamentary approval I proposed to allocate £1,315 million in 1989-90 to central Government health and personal social services in Wales. On the 27 January 1989 I announced the current and capital allocations to health authorities in Wales, and gave details of allocations for centrally funded developments. Further details of proposed expenditure were given in the 1989-90 supply estimates, presented to Parliament by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury on 14 March 1989 (HC 231-XVII).

In addition to these record allocations, I propose to make a special allocation of £10 million in 1989-90 to the health service in Wales, towards the costs of the review body awards which were announced on 16 February 1989.

We are now spending £36 per week per household on the Health Service compared with £11 per week per household in 1978-79, when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister in the Welsh Office.

Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to provide extra money for the schools service in Wales so as to improve the educational service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Public expenditure White Papers show that provision for the education service in Wales has increased since this Government came to office. The increase in provision for current expenditure is particularly significant because in this period pupil numbers have fallen by over 13 per cent. The increase in capital provision in recent years has provided local education authorities with the opportunity to rationalise their schools provision to obtain the financial and educational benefits offered by falling schools rolls.

Credit Boom

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the consequences for the Welsh economy of the credit boom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Welsh economy is sound and confidence in its capacity to develop further remains high.

Wales has experienced double the increase in the growth in output for the United Kingdom overall. United Kingdom production and construction grew by 4·2 per cent. between the third quarters of 1987 and 1988; the comparable figure for Wales was 8·4 per cent.

Regional Policy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to make the implementation of regional policy in Wales more effective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have at my disposal a wide range of policy mechanisms to stimulate and sustain economic

activity in Wales, principally regional industrial assistance, the activities of the Welsh Development Agency and Mid Wales Development and support for urban aid. The fact that seasonally adjusted unemployment has fallen for 34 consecutive months, factory lettings are at record levels and that Wales continues to attract significant inward investment testifies to the success of the commitment which the Government have to economic regeneration in the Principality.

Head Teachers

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales over each of the 10 years from 1978 to 1988 how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female head teachers of schools in Wales have left for the following reasons *(a)* normal retirement, *(b)* early retirement, specifying the various reasons for this, *(c)* death in service, and *(d)* death within five years of retirement; and how many in each category were from (i) primary schools, (ii) secondary schools, (iii) special schools and (iv) other schools.

Mr. Butcher: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is provided in the following tables.

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of Welsh primary schools, between 1978 and 1988

	Normal retirements	*Early retirements:*		*Deaths in service*	*Deaths within 5 years of retirement*
		Infirmity	*Premature*		
1978-79					
Male	46	5	4	5	13
Female	11	1	2	0	1
1979-80					
Male	38	3	23	2	13
Female	12	3	14	0	0
1980-81					
Male	39	6	34	5	16
Female	17	1	20	0	1
1981-82					
Male	33	2	66	3	12
Female	20	3	36	0	3
1982-83					
Male	21	8	69	4	6
Female	10	5	45	0	2
1983-84					
Male	25	5	58	1	8
Female	11	9	38	2	1
1984-85					
Male	21	5	73	2	2
Female	9	4	40	1	2
1985-86					
Male	15	6	51	1	0
Female	7	6	33	2	2
1986-87					
Male	10	11	34	3	1
Female	6	5	23	0	1
1987-88					
Male	17	7	21	1	0
Female	5	4	31	0	0
TOTALS					
Male	265	58	433	27	71
Female	108	41	282	5	13

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of Welsh secondary schools, between 1978 and 1988.

	Normal retirements	*Early retirements:*		*Deaths in service*	*Deaths within 5 years of retirement*
		Infirmity	*Premature*		
1978-79					
Male	14	0	1	3	4
Female	0	0	0	0	0
1979-80					
Male	8	1	5	1	4
Female	0	0	0	0	0
1980-81					

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Early retirements: Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
Male	3	0	9	2	2
Female	0	0	2	0	0
1981-82					
Male	10	0	5	0	3
Female	0	0	0	0	0
1982-83					
Male	2	0	11	0	2
Female	0	0	3	0	0
1983-84					
Male	1	0	14	1	2
Female	0	0	1	0	0
1984-85					
Male	5	0	6	3	0
Female	1	0	0	0	0
1985-86					
Male	0	0	17	0	0
Female	0	0	2	0	0
1986-87					
Male	1	2	4	1	0
Female	0	0	0	0	0
1987-88					
Male	0	1	8	0	0
Female	0	0	0	0	0
TOTALS					
Male	44	4	80	11	17
Female	1	0	8	0	0

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of Welsh special schools, between 1978 and 1988

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Early retirements: Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
1978-79					
Male	0	1	0	0	0
Female	1	0	1	0	0
1979-80					
Male	2	0	0	0	0
Female	0	0	0	0	0
1980-81					
Male	1	0	0	0	0
Female	1	0	1	0	0
1981-82					
Male	2	0	1	0	0
Female	1	0	1	0	0
1982-83					
Male	0	0	2	0	0
Female	1	0	1	0	0
1983-84					
Male	2	1	1	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	0
1984-85					
Male	1	0	2	0	0
Female	1	0	1	0	0
1985-86					
Male	1	0	3	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	0
1986-87					
Male	1	0	4	0	0
Female	0	1	0	0	0

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Early retirements: Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
1987-88					
Male	0	0	0	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	0
TOTALS					
Male	10	2	13	0	0
Female	5	1	8	0	0

Table providing numbers of head teacher retirements/deaths in respect of Welsh other schools, between 1978 and 1988

	Normal retirements	Early retirements: Infirmity	Early retirements: Premature	Deaths in service	Deaths within 5 years of retirement
1978-79					
Male	5	0	1	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	0
1979-80					
Male	1	0	1	1	1
Female	0	1	1	0	0
1980-81					
Male	1	0	1	0	0
Female	0	0	2	0	0
1981-82					
Male	0	0	2	1	0
Female	1	0	5	0	0
1982-83					
Male	1	0	3	0	0
Female	0	0	3	1	0
1983-84					
Male	1	0	0	1	0
Female	0	1	4	0	0
1984-85					
Male	4	0	3	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	0
1985-86					
Male	5	2	7	0	0
Female	0	0	1	0	0
1986-87					
Male	1	0	2	0	0
Female	1	0	7	0	0
1987-88					
Male	3	0	3	0	0
Female	0	3	1	0	0
TOTALS					
Male	22	2	23	3	1
Female	2	5	26	1	0

Valleys Initiative

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional allocations he made to the Housing Corporation in Wales to implement the objectives of the valleys initiative; and whether he instructed them to allocate this sum specifically to valley housing association initiatives.

Mr. Grist: An additional £4·5 million was allocated to the Housing Corporation in Wales in 1988-89 and £8·6 million to Housing for Wales (Tai Cymru) for 1989-90 for the provision of housing under the programme for the valleys. The sums are being targeted specifically on the programme area.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what requests he has received to address a conference of the 15 valleys initiative local authorities in south Wales on the subject of regional policy and investment in the infrastructure; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have received no request to address this specific conference. Welsh Office officials are of course in regular touch with valleys local authorities on many aspects of the valleys programme.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newport,

West on 21 March, *Official Report*, column *502*, he will define the areas included in his calculations and the percentage of the population covered by the valleys programme that is included in the total.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The area used to calculate the unemployment figures for the hon. Gentleman's question of 21 March 1989 is shown in the following tables:

District	*Wards*	*District*	*Wards*
Blaenau Gwent	Nos. 1-18	Ogwr	Nos. 3-11, 17
Torfaen	Nos. 1, 7-11	Lliw Valley	Nos. 1, 4-8
Islwyn	Nos. 1-10, 12	Neath	Nos. 4, 5, 7-16
Rhymney Valley	Nos. 3-20	Port Talbot	Nos. 5, 9-11
Merthyr Tydfil	Nos. 1-9	Brecknock	Nos. 29-33
Cynon Valley	Nos. 1-12, 14	Llanelli	Nos. 7, 8, 11
Rhondda	All wards	Dinefwr	Nos. 2-6, 9, 14, 15
Taff Ely	Nos. 1-7, 10-13		

The latest available total resident population covered by the valleys programme area on the above basis is 696,720 according to the 1981 census of population. Official estimates of population for more recent years are not available at a Ward level.

The figure of 35,675 unemployed in May 1988 quoted in the previous answer if 5·1 per cent. of that number, but the two figures are obviously not on a comparable basis either in terms of the period or population covered.

SCOTLAND

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place as to the feasibily of introducing an employee share ownership scheme in any future privatisation that his Department may sponsor.

Mr. Lang: In relation to the flotation of the successor companies to the Scottish electricity boards, we shall be discussing with the boards measures to encourage the participation of employees in the share offer. Proposals already submitted by the trade unions will be taken into account in these discussions.

The Scottish Bus Group is to be sold in a number of units and it will be for prospective purchasers to determine the share ownership structure of their bids. My right hon. and learned Friend has, however, indicated that bids involving a high level of employee participation will be given preference.

Agricultural Income

Mr. Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest available estimate of the income per agriculture holding in Scotland *(a)* including non-agricultural income and *(b)* excluding such income.

Information about non-agricultural income is available only from a 1 per cent. sample of the tax records of individuals registered as having a self-employment income from agriculture and horticulture. For the 1985-86 assessment year, the latest available, the average total income per farmer was £11,845, and the average agricultural and horticultural income was £6,368.

Holiday Cottages

Mr. Steel: To ask the secretary of state for Scotland if he will make a statement about the effect on any local authority finances of choosing to levy the poll tax on holiday cottages at a multiplier of one instead of two.

Mr. Rifkind: The effect would be to halve that authority's potential income from dwellings which are subject to the standard charge. A lower multiplier might still, for some authorities, yield as much income from such properties as did domestic rates. Each local authority is free to take such a decision in the light of its assessment of all the circumstances.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of those imprisoned in Scotland in 1988 have been admitted to National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not readily available in the form requested. In 1987, the latest year for which figures are available, 62 inmates in Scottish penal establishments were treated for psychoses.

Licensing Law

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects to complete his current review of licensing law in Scotland;

(2) what consultations he proposes to undertake after the review of licensing law in Scotland is completed; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The review of the licensing law in Scotland has revealed a large measure of support for a number of the reforms canvassed in the consultation paper issued in 1986. I hope soon to announce the Government's intentions, once we have reached conclusions on these matters.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he expects to publish the evidence as well as conclusions submitted to the current review of licensing law in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: No. The comments received in response to the consultation document on the review of the licensing law have, except where respondents have requested confidentiality, been placed on public file which is open to inspection by appointment at St. Andrew's house.

"Nuclear Accidents and the Farmer"

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will distribute copies of the Ministry of Agriculture leaflet "Nuclear Accidents and the Farmer", together with its technical supplement to all farmers within a 25-mile radius of all nuclear installations in Scotland; and if he will make a statement on the availability of these documents.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: These documents are at present being recast slightly to reflect Scottish circumstances. They will be distributed as soon as possible to all farmers in Scotland in the vicinity of major nuclear installations, as was done in England.

Rating Reform

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that any private landlord who collects the poll tax from his tenants keeps an accurate record of payments made by each tenant; and how the money will be recovered if any such landlord fails to pay in these sums in full by the date of enforcement action for recovery taking place.

Mr. Lang: Payment of the personal community charge is, as its name implies, a personal responsibility and individuals are not required to make payments to private landlords but directly to the levying authority. Contributions to the collective community charge may, however, be collected by private landlords from people who at any time have their sole of main residence in premises, which have been designated by a community charge registration officer as subject to the collective community charge. Under sections 11(13) and (14) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended, landlords are required to issue receipts in respect of any such contributions made to them, showing the amounts paid and the days to which the contributions relate. They are also required to keep a record of all persons who have been solely or mainly resident in the premises, the period during which they were so resident and the amounts paid in contributions. The landlords themselves are liable to pay to the local authority the collective community charge determined in respect of their premises. Any shortfall in the amount due may be recovered by the levying authority by diligence as provided for in the 1987 Act.

Animal Disease

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the last three years the number of confirmed cases of animal disease the incidence of which is notifiable.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is as follows:

Disease	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Anthrax	2	2	Nil
Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy	Nil	Nil	49
Paramyxovirus in Pigeons	8	67	10
Sheep Scab	Nil	1	1

National Health Service (Consumer Attitudes)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the full report of the survey of consumer attitudes to the National Health Service in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Yes. The report of survey findings is published today, and copies are available in the House of Commons Library. This report, by Research Surveys of Great Britain Ltd., contains more comprehensive and detailed results than were published in the summary report on 7 March 1989.

The report shows that the Health Service is generally highly regarded by its patients and by the public at large and that patients have a particularly high regard for the medical and nursing care which they receive.

The report identifies a number of areas where improvements were wanted and of these the most frequently mentioned were reduced waiting time—for admission and treatment, hospital food, transport arrangements, reluctance of doctors to make home visits and information from health personnel about the patient's condition.

Two interesting consumer views were *(a)* that many of the services which required attendance at hospital out-patients departments could be more conveniently provided at local health clinics and *(b)* that three in 10 hospital in-patients would be willing to travel to a hospital further away (one in six over 50 miles) if this would reduce the waiting time for admission.

By obtaining the views of recent patients and other members of the public the Government is seeking to take full account of consumer views when considering future Health Service priorities. The report of the survey will be sent to all health board general managers and the main messages contained in it will be discussed with them in order to secure action in response to the expressed views of consumers.

Bathing Waters

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the results for 1988 of monitoring Scottish bathing waters in accordance with the European Council bathing waters directive; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My Department's assessment of the results of the monitoring undertaken by the river purification boards in 1988 is set out in the table following, based on the standards for coliforms.

The results are disappointing compared with those in 1987, the first year in which waters were identified in terms of the EC directive. However, the monitoring in 1988 was more intensive, the minimum number of samples analysed for each water having been increased from 12 in 1987 to 20 in 1988. This is in consequence of the European Commission's strict interpretation of the directive: that unless at least 20 samples are taken in the season, a member state cannot establish the 95 per cent. necessary to discount a single failure.

The Government is aware of public concern about the quality of bathing waters and is determined that they should comply with the directive's standards as quickly as possible. To this end, my right hon. and learned Friend announced last November an additional allocation of £5·5

million for water and sewerage in the last financial year and has increased the allocation for this year by some 14 per cent. over planned expenditure. This should allow the sewerage authorities to make faster progress towards compliance with the directive. I have also had discussions with Fife, Lothian and Strathclyde regional councils and some district councils about the quality of waters in their areas.

I have placed in the Library a paper which summarises the 1988 results and sets out the plans to improve the quality of those waters which do not comply with the directive. We shall also be sending the results to the European Commission.

	Result
Nairn (East Beach)	Fail
Cullen	Pass
Fraserburgh	Fail
Aberdeen	Pass
Montrose	Pass
Arbroath	Fail
Carnoustie	Pass
St. Andrew's (West Sands)	Pass
Kinghorn (Pettycur)	Pass
Aberdour (Silversands)	Pass
Gullane	Pass
North Berwick (Milsey Bay)	Fail
Yellowcraigs	Pass
Dunbar (Belhaven)	Pass
Pease Bay	Pass
Sandyhills	Pass
Girvan	Fail
Turnberry	Fail
Ayr (South Beach)	Fail
Prestwick	Fail
Troon (South Beach)	Fail
Irvine-Gailes (New Town)	Fail
Salcoats/Ardrossan (South Beach)	Fail

EMPLOYMENT

Health and Safety

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of work places inspected by the health and safety inspectorate in the Greater London area during the year 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Training Managers

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the private sector firms who are acting as employment training training managers, naming the number of places they have each been allocated, how many filled placed each has and what percentage the latter is of the former.

Mr. Nicholls: Due to the unusual length of the reply, I am sending the hon. Member the available information, which has also been placed in the Library. Employment training is a locally planned and delivered programme. Information on contracted and filled places for particular training managers is not therefore held centrally, and may only be obtained at disproportionate costs.

Disabled People

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many disabled people have been placed in employment through the sheltered placement scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lee: As at 28 February 1989, 4,821 people with severe disabilities were being supported in employment through the sheltered placement scheme. I am pleased to say that the number of jobs supported in this way is set to rise to 6,900 by the end of March 1990. Since the scheme was introduced in April 1985, it is estimated that around 5,870 people with severe disabilities have been placed in sheltered placements. The scheme succeeded the sheltered industrial groups scheme which was already supporting 1,049 jobs.

YTS

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of the obligations of companies within the YTS scheme to provide holiday pay for YTS trainees.

Mr. Cope: YTS managing agents must ensure that non-employed YTS trainees are granted paid holidays at a minimum rate of one and a half days per completed month of training. Such trainees are also entitled to bank and public holidays or days off in lieu with due payment of training allowance. Employed trainees receive holiday pay in accordance with their contract of employment.

Television and Film Making (Report)

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on labour practices in television and film making is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fowler: The MMC report, made under section 79 of the Fair Trading Act 1973, is published today and has been laid before the House. Copies are available in the Vote Office. The Government welcome the evidence of changes for the better in employment and working practices that have occurred in the industry during the course of the commission's investigations. These are attributed to increased competition, advances in technology and changes in employment law. The commission expects further change to continue as a result of current or intended negotiations, or management decisions, though they record their concern about whether change will be sufficiently radical or rapid. The Government will be examining ways of monitoring the necessary further progress in consultation with the major parties concerned in the industry. We note and agree with the commission's concern about the problem of repeat fees and performers' rights regarding consent to repeats of original performances. We are considering the possibility of further study of these issues. We also note the commission's findings and conclusions regarding the union membership agreements with Equity and the Musicians Union. These do not conflict with the Government's case, set out in the Green Paper "Removing Barriers to Employment", for giving individuals the right to complain that they have been refused a job because they are not union members.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Community Care (Grants and Loans)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will indicate the number of cases in the year ended 31 March for the Walthamstow, Leytonstone and Woodgrange park offices of his Department in which loans were not allowed because *(a)* the claimant's inability to repay was considered a factor and *(b)* other reasons, and in which a grant was also not provided to the claimant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is not collected in a format which identifies applications where both a loan and a community care grant are refused for the same item or service.

A reason for decision is used once on each application, but more than one reason for decision can be given in a particular application. Because a record is kept of the total number of times each reason is used, the count of the total number of reasons does not equate to the total of applications to which they were applied.

The table contains the available information:

Office	*Inability to repay considered a factor in loan refusal*	*Other reasons considered*
Walthamstow	45	773
Leytonstone	27	450
Woodgrange Park	23	599

Housing Benefit

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps his Department is taking to publicise the extension until 30 June of the deadline for claiming housing benefit transitional payments; and what steps his Department is taking to encourage take-up of housing benefit transitional payment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The extension of the closing date for housing benefit transitional payments to 30 June was announced in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on 3 March at column *365* and publicised in a press release issued on the same day. A guidance circular was issued to each local authority and local social security office on 6 March, and this has also been sent to the major advice agencies. Leaflets (RR4 Housing Benefit—New Rules), which contain an application form, for anyone still wishing to apply for transitional protection are available from a wide variety of outlets, for example local council offices, local social security offices, from the freephone and freepost service at the transitional payments unit and advice agencies.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average waiting time between a claim for housing benefit transitional payment and its subsequent payment to the claimant;

(2) how many outstanding claims for housing benefit transitional payments are still awaiting process at the Glasgow transitional payments office;

(3) what steps are being taken to expedite the processing of claims for housing benefit transitional payment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Up to 10 April, 467,419 applications for housing benefit transitional payments had been received, of which 422,029 have been assessed. Of the 45,390 applications outstanding, 41,153 are cases where an inquiry form is still awaited from the local authority. The clearance time for applications varies considerably from case to case and depends on how long local authorities take to return inquiry forms and whether further inquiries have to be made from the transitional payments unit (TPU). For straightforward cases, it takes two days from receiving an application in the TPU to sending the inquiry form to the local authority, 30 days for the local authority to return the inquiry form to the TPU, a further five days from receiving that inquiry form at the TPU to deciding whether a payment can be made, and depending upon the point in the payment cycle the first payment will be made within two to four weeks and at four weekly intervals thereafter. The TPU has contacted all those local authorities who have had inquiry forms outstanding for more than eight weeks requesting an urgent response.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will estimate the number of single parent families on family credit who suffered a net loss in income as a result of the housing benefit changes in 1988;

(2) if he will estimate the average weekly amount lost by a single-parent family as a result of family credit being included in the calculations in order to determine elegibility to housing benefit; and what savings have accrued to his Department's annual budget as a result.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The estimated effects on claimants of the April 1988 changes were set out in the "Impact of the Reformed Structure of Income-Related Benefits" published in October 1987. Further information is not available.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to increase financial assistance to single-parent families who have suffered increased housing costs as a result of changes in the housing benefit rules.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to do so. An enhanced premium was included within the housing benefit applicable amounts for all lone parents last April in recognition of their special needs and transitional protection was offered to all those who had lost more than £2·50 per week as a result of the changes in the rules. Since then there have been no changes in the housing benefit rules for single parent families which would have resulted in increased housing costs.

Unemployed Couples (Earnings Disregard)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to increase the £15 earnings disregard for unemployed couples annually in line with the rise in earnings of those in full-time work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Earnings disregards have never been increased in line with the rise in earnings. However, we are monitoring the earnings rules and we will consider whether any change is necessary.

Transitional Protection

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding the financial impact suffered by claimants whose annual uprating has been nullified by loss of transitional protection.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Various representations have been received on this subject.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the numbers of claimants in each benefit category expected to receive no cash increase after the payment of their annual benefit uprating in the current year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We estimated that some 3,840,000 income support claimants will receive an increase at this year's uprating. The estimated number of claimants receiving no increase, by client group, is as follows:

	Number
Pensioners 80+	40,000
Pensioners 60-79	180,000
All pensioners	220,000
Sick or disabled	20,000
Lone parents	40,000
Couples with children	10,000
Others	300,000
TOTAL	[1]590,000

[1] Figures do not sum due to rounding.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings will accrue to public funds by clawing back benefit uprating by withdrawal of transitional protection.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Precise information is not available. Had income support transitional additions not been reduced by increases at uprating, the estimated additional cost in the year 1989-90 would have been around £100 million.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has undertaken to investigate the effect of the loss of transitional protection on claimants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are monitoring all aspects of the reformed social security system. Information about transitional protection will be available from our usual stastistical returns.

Disabled Children (Attendance Allowance)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in how many cases his Department has issued demands for repayment of attendance allowance to the parents of disabled children who have had to spend periods in hospital; what is the average amount involved and highest amount in any particular case; if he intends to insist on the repayments ; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The requested information is not available. The question of whether an overpayment of benefit is recoverable is a matter for the independent statutory authorities to decide. Our policy is to seek repayment of recoverable overpayments where possible, but repayment may be waived depending on the circumstances of the individual case.

Benefits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for the Doncaster and Mexborough areas of South Yorkshire to date what percentage of the total number of applications made to date for *(a)* budgeting loans were (i) full or part awards and (ii) nil awards and *(b)* community care grants were (1) full or part awards and (2) nil awards.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The monthly figures to date of the numbers of applications for budgeting loans and community care grants processed are available in the Library. There is no information available on part awards.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now reply to the invitation of the hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, North to visit young people under 25 years old from Stoke on Trent, North, highlighted in Channel 4's "Dispatches" programme, who have been adversely affected by changes in benefit payments which came into force on 10 April.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I wrote to the hon. Member today.

Child Fostering Allowance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the income available to a family by means of a permanent child fostering allowance is taken into account in assessing the family's entitlement to community charge rebate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Paragraph 24 of schedule 3 of the Housing Benefit (Community Charge Rebates) (Scotland) Regulations 1988 requires such income to be disregarded in full.

Disabled People and Deaf People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the amount of money given under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 to *(a)* all organisations working with and for disabled people and *(b)* all organisations working with and for deaf people, for each year from 1980 to the latest available date.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

I shall let the hon. Member have such information as can be obtained as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Grain (Price)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the tonnage and average price of grain exported from the United Kingdom *(a)* generally and *(b)* separately for each country to which grain was exported in 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Ryder: The total quantity and average price of grain exported from the United Kingdom in the calendar years 1986 to 1988 were as follows:

	Quantity (tonnes)[1]	*Average price (£/tonne)*[2]
1986	8,148,941	108·18
1987	7,238,589	72·41
1988	4,750,249	74·51

Wheat and barley represented over 95 per cent. of total United Kingdom grain exports in each of the calendar years 1986 to 1988. The quantity and price of these two grains exported to individual countries were as follows:

Commodity and Country	*Quantity (tonnes)*[1]			*Average Price (£/tonne)*[2]		
	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Wheat[3]						
France	57,826	78,999	—	114·08	121·37	—
Belgium-Luxembourg	184,010	110,620	250,059	115·00	118·04	110·86
Netherlands	366,078	128,109	87,250	114·13	117·31	110·11
Federal Republic of Germany	737,604	343,122	210,285	114·70	114·77	112·27
Italy	802,896	503,159	323,742	114·95	115·04	115·80
Irish Republic	132,666	135,983	128,884	139·79	135·20	120·33
Denmark	107,508	48,970	—	122·78	115·60	—
Spain	643,319	161,600	78,779	111·07	111·14	110·36
Greece	—	83,502	—	—	120·57	—
Soviet Union	508,389	1,091,333	94,713	113·50	48·45	52·77
Poland	50,012	424,036	—	105·57	59·15	—
Morocco	62,999	—	—	103·33	—	—
Ethiopia	30,921	—	—	122·31	—	—
Lebanon	79,779	—	—	115·04	—	—
South Korea	158,758	241,934	283,906	99·57	64·59	41·11
Bangladesh	—	245,027	176,536	—	40·10	47·58
German Democratic Republic	—	141,225	—	—	44·23	—
Other	64,416	383,787	290,416	72·09	40·73	53·17

Commodity and country	*Quantity (tonnes)*[1]			*Average price (£ tonne)*[2]		
	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Barley[4]						
France	36,428	—	—	134·84	—	—
Belgium-Luxembourg	697,807	280,363	223,277	117·57	123·48	129·96
Netherlands	120,873	93,614	—	118·84	113·02	—
Federal Republic of Germany	138,994	146,439	117,729	118·01	111·62	109·29
Italy	414,356	410,200	275,007	111·96	113·33	119·30
Portugal	59,741	—	—	99·60	—	—
Spain	720,373	—	79,327	107·52	—	111·03
Soviet Union	583,983	1,062,843	919,265	90·26	41·42	47·82
Romania	85,597	—	—	100·33	—	—
Bulgaria	150,431	—	—	77·60	—	—
Tunisia	43,999	—	—	121·16	—	—
Libya	162,493	158,199	—	100·43	41·68	—
Cyprus	86,478	—	—	88·80	—	—
Israel	110,158	—	—	64·76	—	—
Saudi Arabia	645,156	626,343	391,914	93·95	41·97	41·95
German Democratic Republic	—	—	506,404	—	—	53·00
Other	89,800	309,827	297,510	100·91	71·55	59·37

[1] Quantities rounded to nearest whole tonne.
[2] Average prices have been calculated from export values on a free on board basis.
[3] Customs heading 041.2: Unmilled wheat (including spelt) and meslin, excluding durum wheat.
[4] Customs heading 043: Unmilled barley.

Source:

United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics. (A "—" signifies that exports to a country were not separately identified in the published Overseas Trade Statistics for the year in question and are included under "Other" for that year).

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total tonnage and average price of imported grain from each country which exported grain to the United Kingdom in each of the years 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Ryder: Wheat, barley and maize together represented over 95 per cent. of total United Kingdom grain imports in each of the calendar years 1986 to 1988. The quantity and price of these three grains imported from individual countries were as follows:

Commodity and country	*Quantity (tonnes)*[1]			*Average price (£/tonne)*[2]		
	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Wheat[3]						
France	680,700	622,676	596,551	136·22	134·44	142·07
Belgium/Luxembourg	27,084	44,201	75,475	199·31	120·65	140·92
Federal Republic of Germany	97,900	69,348	191,215	157·22	149·62	153·05
Irish Republic	99,408	88,640	53,635	135·23	137·33	119·53
Denmark	—	40,212	97,421	—	133·49	138·82
Spain	—	323,674	52,936	—	157·32	155·57
Australia	219,129	—	—	138·02	—	—
Canada	468,890	461,980	491,572	130·75	98·89	113·07
Others	83,199	25,883	28,004	139·91	119·54	113·56
Barley[4]						
France	29,748	14,709	16,549	150·97	116·87	130·40
Irish Republic	129,821	180,951	173,757	132·32	129·55	119·39

Commodity and country	Quantity (tonnes)[1]			Average price (£/tonne)[2]		
	1986	1987	1988	1986	1987	1988
Denmark	92,121	33,949	100,654	143·95	158·71	145·61
Others	27,437	6,957	26,410	100·74	168·75	124·84
Maize[5]						
France	943,486	970,581	834,731	146·97	150·62	138·67
Belgium/Luxembourg	107,372	62,425	—	143·22	164·26	—
Italy	47,158	—	—	159·89	—	—
Greece	136,746	76,723	139,226	162·83	164·21	147·76
Spain	27,303	68,190	135,305	173·35	160·83	155·20
United States of America	76,092	84,489	—	134·60	77·34	—
Argentina	70,804	134,046	163,814	132·72	60·46	69·05
Others	63,804	114,038	73,087	133·49	91·52	117·44

[1] Quantities rounded to the nearest whole tonne.
[2] Average prices have been calculated from import values on a cost, insurance freight basis.
[3] Customs heading 041.2: unmilled wheat (including spelt) and meslin, excluding durum wheat.
[4] Customs heading 043: unmilled barley.
[5] Customs heading 044 for 1986 and 1987, and 044.9 for 1988: unmilled maize (1988 heading excludes sweetcorn).
Source: United Kingdom Overseas Trade Statistics (a "—" signifies that imports from a country were not separately identified in the published Overseas Trade Statistics for the year in question and are included under "Other" for that year).

Sheep and Single Ewe Premiums

Mr. Steel To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he now expects to announce the end of the variable sheep premium and the choice of base year for calculation of the replacement single ewe premium.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Proposals to phase out the sheep variable premium scheme and replace it with a single ewe premium form part of a package of proposals by the EC Commission for a review of the sheepmeat regime. Discussion on these proposals have made little headway.

Cow Subsidy

Mr. Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will consider raising the cow subsidy from £34 to £46 per head as the permitted maximum within the European Community.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The Government are currently considering what rate of suckler cow premium should apply in the United Kingdom and an announcement will be made before the start of the 1989 scheme year on 15 June.

EC (Abattoirs)

Mr. Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects European Community Ministers to achieve common standards for abattoirs throughout the Community.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I expect the Council of Ministers to apply a single set of rules to slaughterhouses throughout the European Communiity by 31 December 1992.

Beef Regime

Mr. Steel: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will monitor the new beef regime, starting in April and in particular the effect of the £28 headage payment on male cattle to establish the effect on the quality of beef thus being produced.

Mr. Donald Thompson: We shall be monitoring closely the number of animals on which beef special premium is paid and comparing this data with data on slaughterings of male animals to monitor the effects of the headage limit. There are no quality standards attaching to this premium, but the Meat and Livestock Commission will continue to report deadweight prices on a sample basis. These reports classify the carcases reported on according to the EC carcase classification grid and will thus give us some indication of whether overall standards are rising or falling. I am confident, however, that in the absence of a national quality specification set by the beef variable premium scheme, the market will in fact pay a premium for the quality of beef which it wants and that producers will respond to the signals given by the market place.

Game

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had with his European Economic Community counterparts on the draft game meat regulations directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: None. I understand that the European Commission are working on a text but no proposal has yet been made to the Council of Ministers.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to receive the European Economic Community Commission's proposals for new regulations on the welfare of animals in transit.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I understand that the Commission expects to present its proposals to the Council shortly.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which institutions are currently researching the development of a tuberculosis test for live badgers; what such work his Department is funding; and when he expects field trials for such a test to commence.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Ministry funded work on the development of a live test for tuberculosis in badgers,

which is suitable for field use, is being carried out at the central veterinary laboratory. It is too early to predict when field trials might commence.

Porcine Somatotropin

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on how many occasions field trials have been authorised for porcine somatotropin.

Mr. Donald Thompson: On one occasion; the ATC issued has since expired.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a product licence application in respect to bovine somatotropin was submitted to the European Economic Community committee on veterinary medicinal products; and whether it has made any recommendations.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Two applications for product licences for BST products have been referred to the Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products, in September and November 1987. The committee has not yet adopted an opinion on either.

Food Destruction

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton, 16 March, *Official Report*, column *352*, if he will list each food item, and the quantity of it, destroyed during 1988 under the European Community arrangements in all the Community countries.

Mr. Ryder: The latest figures relating to fruit and vegetables withdrawn from the market are for the 1986-87 season and are set out in EC Commission working documents. From these it is possible to derive the following figures for produce which became unfit for consumption before reaching its destination:

Tonnes

	Belgium	*Germany*	*Greece*	*France*	*Ireland*	*Italy*	*Netherlands*	*United Kingdom*	*Spain*
Cauliflowers	258	4,824	—	58,910	—	45,274	—	19,669	—
Tomatoes	20	—	80,305	23,520	194	513,127	—	—	—
Aubergines	—	—	—	452	—	92	—	—	—
Peaches	—	—	165,194	18,751	—	99,078	—	—	—
Apricots	—	—	12	420	—	2	—	—	—
Lemons	—	—	23,769	—	—	422,724	—	—	19,841
Pears	527	—	956	861	—	34	—	32	—
Apples	3,681	—	80,949	15,247	86	331	—	4,535	—
Mandarins	—	—	9,596	—	—	189,625	—	—	—
Oranges	—	—	243,099	998	—	395,330	—	—	—

Figures for the various ends to which fish withdrawn from the market is put in each member state are not available, but the majority is used for animal feed.

Ammonia Gas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is investigating methods of reducing and controlling emissions of ammonia gas from agricultural systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: Yes. Ammonia is released from animal urine and faeces. Research is being done to understand the mechanisms of ammonia release and to devise systems of farm waste treatment and application to land that will minimise volatilisation and losses.

Vaccination

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what discussions he has had with Hoechst about the use of vaccines to control clostridia and pasteurella and the potential link with the deaths of sheep and lambs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement about the results of his investigations into the use of vaccines to control clostridia and pasteurella and the potential link with the deaths of sheep and lambs.

Mr. Donald Thompson: My officials have met Hoechst representatives and discussed the nature of the data required for a thorough investigation of suspected adverse reactions in sheep to vaccines against clostridia and pasteurella. My Department is still receiving reports, all of which will need to be investigated in detail before reliable conclusions can be reached on this matter. These vaccines have been very widely used in the national flock for many years and the reports so far received concern a small percentage of ewes vaccinated. We shall be looking particularly carefully at the nutritional levels in ewes, following the mild winter, and at the incidence of other diseases in the flocks affected.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department possesses about the effectiveness of vaccination schemes against foot and mouth disease and clinical swine fever.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The role of vaccines has been carefully assessed at frequent intervals. Vaccination can be an effective means of controlling foot and mouth disease and classical swine fever where there are significant disease problems. When the number of cases has been reduced eradication by a slaughter policy is a better and ultimately cheaper option than routine vaccination.

Cattle (Slaughter)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state the total number of *(a)*, dairy cattle and *(b)* all cattle slaughtered for human consumption in Britain during 1988; and how many of these were slaughtered at European Economic Community export-approved slaughterhouses.

Mr. Donald Thompson: It is provisionally estimated that 3·4 million cattle and calves were slaughtered in the

United Kingdom in 1988, 1·8 million of which were in EC export-approved slaughterhouses. Dairy cattle slaughtered are not separately distinguished.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will introduce a scheme of compulsory veterinary ante-mortem inspection of all bovines submitted for slaughter to European Economic Community export approved and non-export approved slaughterhouses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The carcases of all animals slaughtered for human consumption are inspected post mortem. In EC export-approved slaughterhouses, an inspection of animals prior to slaughter is also required. I plan to introduce ante mortem inspection of animals in non-EC export-approved slaughterhouses by 1 January 1991.

Veterinary Product Licencer

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is currently reviewing existing veterinary product licences approved for the United Kingdom; what action he is taking to ensure products imported from the European Economic Community will continue to meet British standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: All veterinary product licences are being reviewed to ensure that they conform to up-to-date standards of safety, quality and efficacy. Imports from both EC and other countries, except under emergency provisions, are permitted only in accordance with a product licence issued on the criteria mentioned and following a satisfactory inspection of the manufacturing premises overseas.

Animal Diseases

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those animal diseases which are currently notifiable and indicate the number of confirmed cases of each disease in England and Wales for each of the last three years.

Mr. Donald Thompson: The number of confirmed cases of notifiable diseases over the last three years in England and Wales is as follows:

Disease	*Number of cases* 1986	1987	1988
African horse sickness	—	—	—
African swine fever	—	—	—
Anthrax	9	4	3
Aujeszky's disease	6	6	5
Bovine spongiform encephalopathy[1]	—	—	2,136
Brucella melitensis in cattle	—	—	—
Cattle plague in ruminants and swine	—	—	—
Classical swine fever	10	1	—
Contagious equine metritis[2]	—	—	—
Dourine in horses, asses, mules and zebras	—	—	—
Enzootic bovine leukosis	1	1	1
Epizootic lymphangitis in horses, asses and mules	—	—	—
Equine encephalomyelitis	—	—	—
Equine infectious anaemia	—	—	—
Foot and mouth disease in ruminants and swine	—	—	—
Fowl pest (fowl plague, Newcastle disease and paramyxovirus) poultry of all kinds	—	—	—
Glanders and farcy in horses, asses and mules	—	—	—
Paramyxovirus in pigeons	276	251	205
Pleuro-pneumonia in cattle	—	—	—
Rabies	—	—	—
Sheep pox	—	—	—
Sheep scab	55	37	35
Swine vesicular disease	—	—	—
Warble fly	34	8	4
Teschen disease of pigs	—	—	—
Tuberculosis in cattle (certain forms)	—	—	—

[1] Notifiable since 21 June 1988.
[2] Notifiable since 20 May 1987.

Foot and Mouth Disease

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which member states of the European Economic Community operate schemes of compulsory vaccination of livestock against foot and mouth disease; and if it is his policy to retain quarantine periods in respect of live animals imported from these countries.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to him on 11 April at column *439*.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will introduce restrictions on the movement of offspring of animals which have been confirmed as suffering from bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have no plans to introduce such measures.

Veterinary Checks

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his response to the European Commission proposal to replace veterinary checks on animal health and animal products at national frontiers by checks in the country of origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I refer the hon. Member to the explanatory memorandum concerning draft instrument 8062/88 which was deposited in the Library on 7 November 1988.

Interest Rates

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with the National Farmers Union on the recent increase in interest rates; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson: I have had no recent discussions with the National Farmers Union on interest rates. Policy on interest rates is, of course, the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has made it clear that interest rates are set at an appropriate level to maintain downward pressure on inflation.

Sheepmeat

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he

has received concerning the sheepmeat stabiliser system for the 1988 marketing year, and in particular the base line used for the calculation of the final stabiliser figure for each European Community country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* When the Commission fixed the sheepmeat stabiliser for 1988 it had census figures indicating that, for the Community excluding Great Britain, the reduction in the support level resulting from the stabiliser should be 7 per cent. They chose to adjust this figure downwards to 4 per cent., the same level of reduction as applied to Great Britain. They justified this on the basis that there were anomalies in certain countries' statistics.

We have received a number of representations concerning the application of the stabiliser for 1988. We made clear our objections to the Commission's course of action, particulary in a situation where the Commission has itself been pressing the need for measures to control the rapidly rising cost of the sheep regime.

HEALTH

National Health Service (Staff Training)

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide an estimate of the annual expenditure of the National Health Service in England on training of staff, differentiating between medical and non-medical staff.

Mr. Mellor: We do not have centrally comprehensive information on the total expenditure incurred. However, in 1987-88 relevant revenue expenditure amounted to at least £360 million, which includes the total Revenue expenditure of the National Health Service training authority (£5·5 million) and the English national board for nursing, midwifery and health visiting (£90·5 million). Most of the remainder was incurred by regional and district health authorities. While the expenditure of the English national board for nursing, midwifery and health visiting can be attributed to nurse education and training and the summarised accounts of regional and district health authorities identify some £10 million for postgraduate medical and dental education, in general the information available does not differentiate between expenditure incurred on training medical and non-medical staff.

The National Health Service training authority is piloting a set of training activity indicators in a number of health authorities which, among other measures, are designed to identify more precisely expenditure on training on different staff groups.

Overseas Patients

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he is giving to the number of overseas patients that can be treated in the self-managing hospitals proposed in the White Paper "Working for Patients".

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: We are considering how treatment of overseas patients in National Health Service hospitals, including self-governing hospitals, might best be administered in the context of the White Paper and associated working papers.

Clinical Grading

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff from each of the old grades have been assimiliated to each of the new grades in the recent clinical grading structure for each of the specialty branches of nursing, midwifery and health visiting.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested cannot be derived from the data which are held centrally. The information which is available has already been placed in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require health authorities to provide figures on the number of nurse regrading appeals currently outstanding in district health authorities within the Yorkshire region, and the stage in the appeal processes in each district health authority.

Mr. Mellor: No. The processing of appeals under the national agreement is a matter for individual health authorities.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements have been made to process nurse re-grading appeals in each of the district health authorities within the Yorkshire region.

Mr. Mellor: Appeals are being dealt with under a long-standing agreement between the management and trades union sides of the General Whitley Council on procedures for settling differences over NHS employees' conditions of service. Detailed arrangements for operating this agreement are for local decision, and we collect no information centrally.

Toxic Waste (Doncaster)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations to date he has received from residents living in or near Doncaster metropolitan borough council concerning the proposed toxic waste site at Kirk Sandell by Leigh Environmental and the environmental implications for this populated area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: One representation has been received to date. Responsibility for the licensing of toxic waste disposal sites lies with the local authority, under powers granted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Sites must be registered with Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, which is responsible for subsequent monitoring and advice on discharges from the site. The Department of Health will advise the Department of the Environment on possible health effects of discharged chemicals if they are asked to do so.

Male Circumcision

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the National Health Service of male circumcision operations in the last 10 years for which figures are available; and what was the cost of comparable operations in the private sector.

Mr. Mellor: We do not collect this information centrally.

GOS Forms

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what quantity of form GOS 2 (R), National Health Service repair and replacement of spectacles voucher application, was printed with *(a)* words indicating or implying that full-time students under 19 years would be eligible for free repairs without family practitioner committee approval and *(b)* prescription details requiring left eye before right; and if he will make a statement outlining what advice he has given to opticians and ophthalmic medical practitioners regarding these errors;

(2) what quantity of form GOS (V), National Health Service spectacle voucher applications, has been printed requiring left eye to be entered before right; and what advice he has given to opticians and ophthalmic medical practitioners as to how to deal with this error;

(3) what quantity of form GOS (P), patient's prescription/statement, was printed showing left eye first, right eye second, if he will make a statement as to what advice he has given to opticians and ophthalmic medical practitioners as to how to deal with this error; and how the advice has been conveyed;

(4) what was the cost of the new forms relating to eye examinations which were printed with errors, GOS(P), GOS2(R) and GOS(V); and who will bear the cost of any mistakes or confusion which arise as a consequence of these printing errors;

(5) on what date family practitioner committees received the forms which were needed by opticians for use on 1 April;

(6) whether he intends to continue to use forms GOS(ST)A and GOS(P) in their present design which makes it impossible to use carbon paper for information required to be duplicated on each form.

Mr. Mellor: The revised GOS forms were delivered to family practitioner committees on Monday 19 March.

A total of 150,000 copies of forms GOS(P), GOS(V) and GOS2(R) were printed transposing left and right eye prescription details. FPCs were advised of this on 31 March in a letter which asked them to inform contractors to amend the forms manually until reprinted versions were available. Two million forms GOS2(R) were printed stating that students could have repairs made without reference to the FPC. A health circular and family practitioner notice has been issued advising health authorities and FPCs of this error.

The design of forms GOS(ST) A and GOS(P) will be revised as soon as possible.

Information on the cost of printing forms GOS(P), GOS2(R) and GOS(V) is not currently available. The cost of reprinting will be met by the Department.

Optometrists

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had as a result of his two week consultation on his proposed exemption of optometrists from the requirement to examine for disease as well as refraction; and which bodies supported his proposal and which opposed it.

Mr. Mellor: The Department has received comments to date from 17 bodies and individuals. The great majority are opposed to the proposal.

Air Ionisers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department studied the health effects of domestic air ionisers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department's expert independent advisory committee on the medical aspects of contamination of air and soil reviewed the research into the effects of air ionisers. This includes a presentation to the committee by researchers. The committee advised the Department that the evidence presented did not satisfy them that the use of domestic air ionisers had demonstrable health effects. Results of studies on the health effects of ionised air published subsequently in the scientific literature supports that opinion.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on research into schizophrenia in each of the last two years; and what proportion each figure was of expenditure on the National Health Service research programme.

Mr. Freeman: In 1988-89, £1,307,900 was made available from the Department of Health and Social Security for directly commissioned health, personal social services and social security research programmes for research into mental illness, much of which will be relevant to sufferers from schizophrenia. In 1987-88 the comparable sum was £1,267,000. Expressed as a percentage of the health, personal social services and social security research budget the figures are 8·2 per cent. and 9·3 per cent. respectively.

In 1986 a specific research initiative on schizophrenia was started consisting of seven new research studies. It is hoped that the results of these projects will provide valuable information on the pattern of care of schizophrenia patients.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current annual cost per patient to the National Health Service in the Mersey health region of the care and treatment of patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses;

(2) how much was spent in the Mersey health region in the last year on the care and treatment of patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses; and what percentage that figure represented of total expenditure on *(a)* mental and *(b)* all health services.

Mr. Freeman: Information relating specifically to the cost of treating patients suffering from schizophrenia psychoses in the Mersey region is not collected centrally.

Anti-psychotic Drugs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were written for anti-psychotic drugs in each year since 1985; and how many were written for *(a)* prochlorperazine, *(b)* thioridazine, *(c)* chlorpromazine hydrochloride and *(d)* trifluoperazine.

Mr. Mellor: We have no information centrally about the number of prescriptions written by doctors. Official statistics are based on the prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists. The information about the drugs requested is therefore as follows:

(,000)

England	1985	1986	1987
All anti-psychotic drugs	4,430	4,436	4,409
Prochlorperazine	2,288	2,214	2,147
Thioridazine	597	623	657
Chlorpromazine HCl	542	532	513
Trifluoperazine	486	471	479

Tardive Dyskinesia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to provide the public with information on the causes and dangers of tardive dyskinesia.

Mr. Freeman: No. It is for doctors to provide information to their patients about possible adverse reactions associated with prescribed medicines.

Paddington Chest Clinic

Mr. Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present ownership of property known as the Paddington chest clinic, Newton road, London, W2; when the property was sold and to whom; and whether the property was placed on the open market for sale by tender upon the advice of a professional valuer.

Mr. Freeman: The sale of property in the Paddington area is the responsibility of Parkside health authority.

Midwives

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by country the percentage of home delivery training that is given to trainee midwives in the European Economic Community member states: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We do not hold information centrally on the percentage of home delivery training given to student midwives either in this country or in the European Community. The aim of midwifery education in England is to encompass antenatal, perinatal and postnatal care, as well as delivery, in both hospital and community setting in an integrated fashion.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last had consultations with the Association of Radical Midwives; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We have had no consultations with the Association of Radical Midwives. Our usual contacts with the midwifery profession are with the Royal College of Midwives and the statutory bodies for nursing, midwifery and health visiting.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has estimates for the extra revenue that would be generated through the extension of prescription charges to those reaching retirement age throughout the current year while exempting those on income support; and if he has further estimates for the additional revenue that would be generated if such a policy was projected over the next five years.

Mr. Mellor: The information needed to make these estimates is not available.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what would be the extra annual revenue generated by the extension of prescription charges to all those over retirement age, exempting only those in receipt of income support.

Mr. Mellor: I estimate that the additional annual revenue would be in excess of £200 million.

Hospital Formularies

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incentives are contained within the existing hospital formularies system for the development in the United Kingdom of new and improved drugs.

Mr. Mellor: The existence of hospital formularies is, in itself, an incentive for the development of safer and more effective medicines. Hospital formularies are subject to ongoing review. Drug companies, bearing this in mind, will therefore work towards the production of medicines which meet criteria for hospital use and demonstrate advantages over existing products, to warrant their inclusion in the formularies.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make funds available for the compilation of local drug formularies.

Mr. Mellor: Extra funds have been made available to FPCs from 1989-90 to enable them to carry out their increased responsibilities, as announced in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health". These responsibilities include encouraging the development of local drug formularies.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the effect of European Community directives will be upon the prospects for the introduction of a national United Kingdom formularly for drugs.

Mr. Mellor: We have no plans to introduce a national formulary. We do however wish to see the continued development of voluntary, local formularies as part of the effort by doctors to achieve more effective and economic prescribing. Such formularies will not be affected by the European Community directives.

Modern Drugs

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department last carried out cost/benefit studies on the potential savings to be made through the greater use of modern drugs instead of expensive hospital care; and what conclusions he has drawn from those studies.

Mr. Mellor: The Department has not itself commissioned any such research, but we are aware of some useful studies on this topic.

Generic Medicines

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he intends to make to increase the information available to general practitioners through improvements to the labelling of generic medicines.

Mr. Mellor: The information put on medicine labels is that essential to tell patients how to use their medicines.

Since most GPs never see labels, they are not generally a practicable way to provide doctors with information about drugs.

Kidney Donor Cards

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his current advice concerning the advisability of people in HIV high risk groups carrying kidney donor cards; and if he will list any medical conditions which render carrying such cards inadvisable.

Mr. Mellor: On 2 March 1987 the Department's chief medical officer wrote to all doctors to remind them of the precautions needed to prevent the transmission of HIV through the transplant of infected tissue or organs. He made it clear that it was essential that blood from the donor is tested and found negative for HIV antibodies before the organ or tissue is transplanted and that inquiries should also be made to exclude donors most likely to have been exposed to the AIDS virus. I do not propose at present to issue a list of contra-indications to organ donation because assessment of the medical suitability of a potential donor is a matter for the doctors concerned, and is undertaken at the time of donation.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to respond to the National Association of Health Authorities ' report entitled "Action Not Words: a Strategy to Improve Health Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Groups;" if he plans to take any action to encourage implementation of its proposals and guiding principles and objectives by health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Members for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) on 9 February 1989 at columns *800-1*.

Hospitals (Site Value)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the most recently calculated site value for each of the hospitals with over 250 beds.

Mr. Freeman: The valuation of the NHS estate does not provide site values in terms of bed numbers and to obtain the information by a special exercise would incur disproportionate cost.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received on the use of hormone replacement therapy for the prevention of stroke and fractures of the femur in elderly women National Health Service patients.

Mr. Freeman: I am advised that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) prevents bone loss in post-menopausal women and therefore reduces the risk of fractures. There is also evidence that HRT may provide additional protection against heart disease and strokes. Since there may be risks as well as benefits of such treatment for some people, the individual patient's suitability for HRT should be a matter for the clinical judgment of their doctor. The Medical Research Council has set up a specialist group to look at the further research required into HRT.

Glaucoma

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from his Department's consultant adviser on ophthalmology on screening programmes for the early detection of glaucoma in National Health Service patients.

Mr. Freeman: Any advice given to the consultant adviser to the chief medical officer is confidential.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he proposes to introduce to encourage family doctors to screen National Health Service patients for cervical and breast cancers.

Mr. Freeman: Guidance to health authorities on cervical cancer screening was contained in HC(88)1 of January 1988. Breast cancer screening was covered by draft circular DA(87)14 of March 1987 and the letter EL(88)P/48 of April 1988. Copies of these are in the Library.

The cervical cancer screening service is provided largely through GPs, whereas breast cancer screening is available through static centres and mobile units provided by health authorities. In both programmes GPs are involved in the issuing of invitations to eligible women.

To encourage GPs to achieve higher levels of cover, the item of service payment for cervical cancer screening is to be replaced by target payments. Such payments will be made for achieving or helping to achieve (for example with the family planning clinic) cover of 80 per cent. of the relevant practice population. By this means we believe that a significant increase will be achieved in the numbers of women screened and therefore in the numbers of cases of early detection and successful treatment of conditions which otherwise might have developed into cervical cancer.

In the case of breast cancer screening we would expect GPs to be involved in discussions on arrangements for the follow-up and treatment of any of their patients who have screen-detected abnormalities. Resource material for primary care teams, including a practical guide for GPs, has been developed by the Cancer Research Campaign. These information packs are being distributed free of charge to every GP practice in the country three months prior to eligible women in the practice being invited for screening.

Health Screening

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures his Department proposes as a follow-up to the "Look After Your Heart!" campaign; and if he proposes to ask all family doctors to undertake screening programmes among National Health Service patients to detect and treat risk factors for coronary artery disease;

(2) what measures his Department is planning to encourage family doctors to undertake screening programmes to detect patients requiring treatment for mild to moderate hypertension.

Mr. Mellor: The "Look After Your Heart!" campaign is a continuing one with two main aims. First, to raise awareness of the risk factors associated with coronary

heart disease. Secondly, to help people make the necessary lifestyle changes in key areas such as nutrition, smoking, alcohol consumption and exercise. Work continues on both fronts. Under changes to general practitioners' terms of service proposed in the document "A New Contract" which was sent to all GPs on 23 February, it will be a requirement that GPs offer patients regular check-ups. These check-ups will include measurement of blood pressure. We believe that this important development will provide an opportunity for GPs to advise patients, particularly those at risk, of measures to avoid developing high blood pressure. Whenever hypertension is identified they will be able at an early stage to take whatever action is appropriate to control the situation. We have also asked the standing medical advisory committee to advise on the cost-effectiveness of wider cholesterol testing in the prevention and treatment of heart disease.

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department proposes to encourage special screening and treatment programmes to detect and treat National Health Service patients suffering from diabetes mellitus.

Mr. Freeman: Provisions of screening and treatment programmes for National Health Service patients suffering from diabetes mellitus is a matter for individual health authorities. Under changes to general practitioner terms of service proposed in the document "A New Contract", which was sent to all general practitioners on 23 February, it will be a requirement that general practitioners offer patients regular check ups. These check ups will include a urine test which, amongst other things, will provide an indication of whether further investigations are necessary to determine whether or not a patient is suffering from diabetes mellitus. The early identification of disease is an essential part of the package of changes to general practice set out in the White Paper "Promoting Better Health".

Cook-chill Food

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1), pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield on 7 April, *Official Report*, columns *303-4*, if he will give the reference for the press reports on cook-chill food which he refers to as biased and inaccurate;

(2) if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield on 7 April, *Official Report*, columns *303-4*, he will seek a report from the Wakefield district health authority as to when it received representations from the hon. Member for Wakefield and which representations did not relate to cook-chill food at Clayton hospital.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is for the district health authority to follow up local complaints. But my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health is writing to the hon. Member about his request for cook-chill to be suspended, and he will enclose with that letter a copy of the article referred to and a copy of the unit general manager's subsequent letter to the editor of the newspaper concerned setting out the true position.

Residential Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy on the installation of electronic monitoring equipment in residential homes for the elderly.

Mr. Mellor: The installation of such equipment is a matter for the local authority concerned together with the proprietors of independent sector homes. We would hope that any equipment installed would be consistent with the human dignity of residents, a homely atmosphere and the necessary human contact betwen residents and staff.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention to introduce a system of care tests to ensure that elderly persons do not enter residential care unnecessarily.

Mr. Mellor: We are considering the case for introducing a system for assessment of need for residential care as part of our wider examination of community care following Sir Roy Griffiths' report. We hope to be able to bring forward our proposals on community care in the near future.

Foster Parents

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to local authorities and voluntary organisations regarding insurance procedures for foster parents.

Mr. Mellor: Regulation 3 of the Boarding Out of Children (Foster Placement) Regulations requires local authorities and voluntary organisations to include with notices of approval to foster parents information on the agency's arrangements for meeting any legal liabilities of a foster parent arising by reason of the placement. The regulations come into force on 1 June 1989. The accompanying handbook of guidance suggests a number of different arrangements for meeting claims by or against foster parents in respect of damage, loss or injury or legal defence costs.

Apnoea

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the condition known as apnoea is categorised.

Mr. Freeman: Apnoea simply means without breath. It can be normal, as with deglutition apnoea which occurs in swallowing, or abnormal, as a result of a number of medical conditions. It may occur on a temporary basis as a consequence of treatment, for example during the administration of an anaesthetic.

Birmingham Family Practitioner Committee

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received a request from the Birmingham family practitioner committee to approve an out-of-time investigation into allegations involving one or more doctors in Birmingham, following an article in *The Sunday Times* on 22 November 1987; how many doctors are the subject of this request; and what reply has been sent to the Birmingham family practitioner committee.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* An application relating to one doctor was received on 3 March 1989. A reply will be issued shortly.

Artificial Limbs and Appliances

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to review the provision to

Parliament of sufficient information to monitor the development of the artificial limb and appliance services, in view of his refusal to provide substantive replies to parliamentary questions relating to services provided by the Disablement Services Authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* Questions relating to services provided by the Disabled Services Authority (DSA) should be addressed to the Disablement Services Authority. The Secretary of State has referred most parliamentary questions relating to the artificial limb and appliance service accordingly. Hon. and right hon. Members who have been so referred have received full and detailed information of the progress made by the DSA in implementing its statutory functions. The authority also publishes an annual report which is available in the Library of the House. The Secretary of State has no plans for reviewing these arrangements.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what date he expects to transfer the responsibility for the artificial limb and appliance services from the Disablement Services Authority to health authorities; what wil be his policy on providing information concerning the services in reply to parliamentary questions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answe 12 April 1989]:* The Disablement Services Authority will transfer responsibility for the artificial limb and appliance service (ALAS) to NHS health authorities on 1 April 1991. Until then, the Secretary of State will continue to refer questions relating to the ALAS to the Disablement Services Authority which he is confident will continue to provide, direct to hon. and right hon. Members, full and detailed information concerning developments in the services it administers.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Free TV Licences

13. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he now has any proposals to introduce free television licences for pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: We have no plans to do so.

Plastic Bullets

14. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to approve the provision of the new Arwen Ace plastic bullet gun to police forces in England and Wales.

26. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to approve the provision of the new Arwen Ace plastic bullet gun to police forces in England and Wales.

46. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce his decision on the provision of the new Arwen Ace plastic bullet gun to police forces in England and Wales.

59. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to approve the provision of the new Arwen Ace plastic bullet gun to police forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to approve the provision of the new Arwen Ace plastic bullet gun to police forces in England and Wales.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Equipment for use in situations of serious public disorder is kept under review. No decision has been taken to replace the currently authorised baton round equipment but a number of baton round dischargers, including the Arwen Ace, are being considered as possible replacements.

Drug Traffickers

15. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in securing closer international co-operation on confiscation of drug traffickers' assets.

Mr. Hurd: We have signed bilateral agreements with the United States of America, Canada, the Bahamas, Australia and Switzerland, and have completed substantive negotiations with Spain and Sweden. Other bilateral discussions are in progress, and, in the forthcoming meeting of Ministers of the Council of Europe's Pompidou Group, we shall be discussing how to strengthen co-operation in this area.

30. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reciprocal agreements he has now secured with other countries with regard to the tracing and seizure of drug traffickers and the freezing or confiscation of their illegally derived assets.

Mr. John Patten: We have signed bilateral agreements with five Governments and completed substantive negotiations with two others. We have played an active part in the adoption of a new United Nations convention against drug trafficking, and in work towards a new Council of European convention on the confiscation of criminal proceeds.

34. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to seek to improve the prevailing level of co-operation between European countries, including the United Kingdom, on drug trafficking prevention, detection and the concomitant prosecution of offenders.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A suitable framework for such co-operation exists in the United Nations convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, adopted in December in Vienna. We take every opportunity to encourage our European partners to sign and ratify the convention at the earliest date possible and meanwhile to implement its provisions to the fullest extent permitted by existing legislation. In all our contacts we lay particular stress on the value of international co-operation in tracing, freezing and confiscating drug traffickers' assets.

Police Fingerprint Service

16. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what improvements have been achieved in the efficiency of the police fingerprint service since the publication of the Audit Commission report on the subject in October 1988.

38. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to improve the efficiency of the police fingerprinting service.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In February 1988, the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers set up a group of police officers, forensic scientists and fingerprint experts to undertake a general review of the work of the scientific support services in police forces, including fingerprint services.

The group has made a number of recommendations on the reorganisation of fingerprint departments and improved training for fingerprint experts. These recommendations, which take into account the findings of the Audit Commission, are currently being considered by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Remand Centres

17. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he proposes to meet the union representatives from remand centres to discuss his proposals for the future of remand centres.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have immediate plans for such a meeting, but prison service management meets trade union representatives regularly to discuss developments in the service. Changes affecting individual establishments are also the subject of local consultation.

25. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will provide the training for staff employed in private remand centres.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It remains to be decided how the training of staff for any private remand centres would be provided, but whatever the arrangements, we would have to be satisfied that adequate training was given.

Right to Silence

18. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received requesting the abolition of a suspect's right to silence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have received a number of suggestions that the right to silence should be modified. My right hon. Friend set up last year a working group to consider what changes in the law were necessary. We are now awaiting its report.

Neighbourhood Watch

19. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes previously established in London are now defunct or disbanded.

Mr. John Patten: The figures collected by the Metropolitan police do not distinguish between those schemes which have failed and those which have temporarily disbanded. Between January 1987 and the end of December 1988 487 schemes are recorded as having failed. During the same period some 2,400 new schemes were set up.

AIDS

20. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to help counter the spread of AIDS in prisons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: High priority is given to measures to prevent the transmission of HIV infection in prison. The main plank of the prevention strategy is education. Our latest initiative is a new package of education materials, including a video film, entitled "AIDS Inside and Out." Other measures include medical inquiry and examination at the reception stage, counselling of individual prisoners, and limited regime restrictions for prisoners identified as HIV antibody positive.

Robbery

21. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the latest figures for robbery in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The provisional figure for the number of robberies recorded by the police in England and Wales in 1988 is 31,437, a decrease of 3·7 per cent. on the figure for 1987. The clear-up rate increased from 21 per cent. to 23 per cent. over the same period.

33. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest national figures available for robbery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is published in table 1 of Home Office statistical bulletin 7/89, a copy of which is in the Library.

Junior Crime Prevention Panels

22. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many junior crime prevention panels have now been established in England and Wales.

77. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of junior crime prevention panels in operation.

79. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of junior crime prevention panels in operation.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of March 1989 there were 165 junior crime prevention panels in England and Wales and others are being set up.

Safer Cities Programme

23. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the safer cities programme.

Mr. John Patten: Good progress has been made in establishing the first nine of the 20 crime prevention projects which will comprise the safer cities programme. Bradford and Wolverhampton projects are already fully operational and Nottingham staff will be taking up post this month. Grant application in support of local schemes have been received and approved for Bradford and Nottingham projects. Five additional areas have recently been invited to join in the programme (Bristol, Hull, Salford, Sunderland and Wirral) of which four have already agreed to participate.

42. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase funding available for the safe city programme.

Mr. John Patten: Financial planning for the safer cities initiative already takes account of the scheduled growth of the programme. Nine projects were set up in 1988-89, a further seven will be established in 1989-90 and four more in 1990-91. A sum of £4·2 million is available for the current financial year. A decision as to whether further expenditure on the programe is called for will be taken in the light of the success of projects now under way.

DNA Testing

24. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the introduction of DNA testing for the purposes of the immigration rules; and if he will make a statement.

32. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the introduction of DNA testing for the purposes of the immigration rules; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that I gave earlier today to a similar question from the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden).

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will now consider, following the advice tendered by the United Kingdom immigrants advisory service, that those applicants who pass DNA tests should be allowed entry into Britain on the grounds that, although now over the age of 18 years, their original applications were made, and refused, when they were under age.

Mr. Renton: A person who makes a fresh application for entry clearance when he is 18 years of age or older is normally expected to meet the requirements set out at paragraphs 51 and 52 of the immigration rules. However, my right hon. Friend is considering whether, and in what circumstances, it might be appropriate to exercise discretion in favour of over-age reapplicants who do not qualify for admission under the rules. We hope to be in a position to announce our conclusions before long.

Violent Crime

27. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take to tackle the current levels of violent crime.

73. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the levels of violent crime in the inner-city areas.

76. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take to ensure greater safety of women from violent crime.

Mr. John Patten: By strengthening the police, and by fostering the safer cities programme in some urban high crime areas, we hope to increase the safety of all citizens. Simple precautions that members of the public can take to reduce the risk of attack are given in the Home Office crime prevention handbook "Practical Ways to Crack Crime."

39. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many crimes of violence were recorded in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1988.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested for 1979-87 is published in Table 2.1 of "Criminal statistics, England and Wales, 1987", Cm. 498; and for 1988 in table 1 of the Home Office statistical bulletin 7/89. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Latchmere House (Detainees)

28. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to transfer detainees from Latchmere house to Haslar in Gosport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to questions from the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 March at col. 9 and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) on 5 April at col. *220*.

Broadcasting Transmission Systems

29. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish in full the consultants' report on broadcasting transmission systems.

Mr. Renton: We have yet to decide how the results of the study should be made public. Parts of it will be commercially confidential.

Magistrates Clerks

31. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the recruitment of magistrates clerks.

Mr. John Patten: We shall shortly be discussing with representatives of magistrates courts committees what steps relating to pay and other matters they can take as employers of courts staff to improve the present shortage of court clerks. We have already approved the establishment of 25 additional trainee posts this year. We plan to authorise more, and to make provision for training accordingly. We also plan to issue by the summer new recruitment publicity material for the magistrates courts service.

Community Volunteers

35. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which areas he proposes to run private schemes for community volunteers; and over what period.

72. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding for the proposed community volunteer schemes will come from existing police authority budgets; and what additional funds will be made specifically available.

53. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has received for the creation of community volunteers.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) earlier today.

Miscarriages of Justice

36. Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review procedures for re-referral of possible miscarriages of justice to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. John Patten: We see no present need to review the procedure.

Crime Statistics

37. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the figures for reported crime in North Yorkshire for 1988.

47. **Mr. Bevan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest crime figures for the West Midlands.

49. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest crime figures for Leicestershire.

51. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest crime figures for Lincolnshire.

82. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the figures for reported crime in Cambridgeshire for 1988.

68. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest crime figures for Nottinghamshire.

67. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest crime figures for Greater Manchester.

60. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the figures for reported crime in Surrey for 1988.

Mr. John Patten: Information is published in table 7 of Home Office statistical bulletin 7/89, a copy of which is in the Library. My right hon. Friend has also sent some further details of the figures for their local police force area to all right hon. and hon. Members for constituencies in England and Wales and placed copies of those further details in the Library.

Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis

40. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange to meet the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to discuss the problems caused to his force by working in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Commissioner and my right hon. Friend meet regularly to discuss policing issues including the particular problems caused by working in London, especially the recruitment and retention of officers and civil staff. My right hon. Friend supports the commissioner's efforts to overcome them.

Broadcasting White Paper

41. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to meet the general advisory committee of the Independent Broadcasting Authority to discuss the White Paper on Broadcasting.

Mr. Renton: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have immediate plans to do so, but we have had several meetings with the IBA and have now received the IBA's response to the White Paper.

Private Security Industry

43. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to impose controls on the private security industry.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to questions from the hon. Members for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) and for Walsall, South (Mr. George) on 15 December 1988 at column *716*.

Caldy Island, Pembrokeshire

44. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress being made to restore the franchise in respect of European and parliamentary elections to the residents of Caldy Island, Pembrokeshire.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand that residents of Caldey Island are included in the register of electors for south Pembrokeshire published and effective from 16 February 1989. Ballot papers should, therefore, be available to the residents for all elections held this year, as in previous years. Nevertheless, I recognise that legislative action needs to be taken to regularise the position of Caldey Island. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is considering the available options as a matter of urgency.

Prison Suicides

45. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the number of suicides in Her Majesty's prisons.

65. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the adequacy of the prison service suicide prevention procedures.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The prison service's strategy for the prevention of inmate suicides has two main elements: to identify inmates who may be at risk of suicide, by means of constant staff vigilance, particularly when the inmate is first received into custody; and to prevent such inmates from actually killing themselves, both by reducing the physical opportunities for suicide in prison and by offering medical and social support to the suicidal inmate. Initiatives such as enhanced staff training in suicide prevention awareness, better cell design, and work on the development of CCTV for the monitoring of suicidal inmates, all contribute to this strategy. While we do not expect to alter the main thrust of our strategy, we are considering in the light of recent experience whether any modifications to our procedures may be helpful.

Police Cars (High-speed Chases)

48. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with chief constables about the use of police cars in high-speed chases of those believed to have committed criminal offences.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend met the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on 20 March to discuss a range of London policing matters, including police car chases.

Fear of Crime

50. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report of the working party on the fear of crime chaired by Mr. Michael Grade.

Mr. John Patten: I hope that the working group will present its report to the Home Office standing conference on crime prevention on 11 December.

52. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list the members of his working party on crime chaired by Mr. Michael Grade.

Mr. John Patten: The appointment of members to the independent working group on the fear of crime is a matter for Mr. Grade, and has yet to be completed.

54. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what budget has been allocated to the working party on the fear of crime chaired by Mr. Michael Grade.

Mr. John Patten: The sum of £3,000 has been allocated in this financial year to support crime prevention working groups, including that chaired by Mr. Grade. The Home Office will also provide administrative and secretarial support for Mr. Grade's working group and will meet the cost of publishing the working group's report.

62. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent surveys he has made of fear of crime among women.

Mr. John Patten: Questions about fear of crime were included in the British crime survey, in a recent international survey conducted by telephone, and in local surveys on housing estates. In each survey care was taken to provide a representative sample of both men and women.

Public Interest Defence

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received on the need for a public interest defence to be incorporated in Official Secrets legislation.

Mr. Hurd: From the publication of our White Paper on the reform of secion 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 on 29 June 1988 up to 4 April 1989 I have received representations in support of a public interest defence from 30 organisations, including 11 from the branches of two national organisations, and from 113 individuals.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to reduce the numbers of women with infants imprisoned for non-violent offences.

Mr. John Patten: The Court of Appeal has made it clear that custody should be used only when a court considers it absolutely necessary. Last July, the Government published proposals for punishing in the community more offenders convicted of less serious and non-violent offences; we are considering how to take matters forward in the light of the responses to those proposals. Meanwhile, the national standards for community service orders, which came into effect on 1 April, asked probation areas to ensure that community service placements are available for women offenders, including those who are pregnant, and offenders with young children. We are also revising the handbook "The Sentence of the Court" which reflects the Court of Appeal's guidance on the use of custody, and the new edition will refer specifically to women offenders with family responsibilities.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons allow women prisoners the right to seek pregnancy advice and counselling independent of the prison.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Prison medical officers have statutory responsibility for all aspects of the health care of prisoners. In the exercise of that responsibility they make extensive use of the specialist consultancy, treatment and counselling services of the National Health Service and other outside agencies. Whether such help is called upon in a particular case is a matter for the clinical judgment of the medical officer concerned.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pregnant women were released from prison before their confinement in each year from 1979 to 1988.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The number of pregnant women released by the exercise of the royal prerogative, between 1979 and 1988 is provided in the table. Information on pregnant women released on completion of their sentences is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pregnant inmates released by royal prerogative

	Number
1979	3
1980	5
1981	3
1982	1
1983	6
1984	8
1985	8
1986	6
1987	15
1988	9

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the carrying out of a full social inquiry report on pregnant women and mothers of dependent children before sentencing.

Mr. John Patten: Home Office policy on social inquiry reports is set out in Home Office circular 92/1986. This states that a social inquiry report should inter alia contain information about the defendant's personality and character including the family situation. I would expect social inquiry reports written on pregnant women and mothers of dependent children to draw attention to those facts without fail and to make recommendations that take account of them in order to help the courts decide on a suitable disposal.

Drink-Related Crime

57. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the percentage of crimes by under-21-year-olds which are drink-related.

Mr. John Patten: Of the people under 21 convicted in 1987, the latest year for which full figures are available, 8 per cent. were convicted of drunkenness or drink-driving offences. No reliable estimate can be made of the extent to which the offences of which the remaining 92 per cent. convicted were alcohol related.

Special Constables (Metropolitan Area)

58. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of special constables in the Metropolitan police are *(a)* from ethnic minorities, and *(b)* women.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the commissioner that, of the 1,419 members of the Metropolitan special constabulary of 14 March 1989, 9 per cent. (134) were from ethnic minorities and 32 per cent. (460) were women.

Transfrontier Broadcasting

61. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he is making in negotiations to establish a new European convention on standards of taste and decency in transfrontier broadcasting.

Mr. Renton: Agreement on the final text of the Council of Europe convention on transfrontier television was reached on 15 March. We hope that a decision to open the convention for signature will be taken shortly.

Co-operation Against Crime

63. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department is doing to promote greater European co-operation against crime.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to questions from my hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 2 February, column *384*.

Passports

64. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the average times taken to process non-urgent passport applications at major passport offices; and what were the comparable times one year ago.

Mr. Renton: The current processing times for straightforward non-urgent postal applications at the six United Kingdom passport offices are shown in the table below, together with those of a year ago. Urgent applications are given priority, and are not normally subject to delay.

Average time between receipt of application and issue of passport (working days)

Passport office	*9 April 1989*	*10 April 1988*
London	21	55
Glasgow	33	28
Peterborough	26	27
Newport	33	17
Liverpool	42	13
Belfast	4	3

Metropolitan Police (Efficiency)

66. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps is he taking to promote greater efficiency in the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 2 February at column *386*.

Burglary

69. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest national figures for burglary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is published in table 1 of Home Office statistical bulletin 7/89, a copy of which is in the Library.

Association of Chief Police Officers

70. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Association of Chief Police Officers; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend has regular discussions with chief officers of police in the course of meetings, visits and conferences. He has not had any recent formal meetings with representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers, but will be attending the ACOP drugs conference on 20 and 21 April.

Firearms Consultative Committee

71. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the names of the chairman and members of the firearms consultative committee.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are not yet able to announce appointments but we regard it as important to have the committee in place as soon as possible.

Local Authorities (Crime Prevention)

74. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking more fully to involve elected local authorities in creating safer environments for their citizens.

Mr. John Patten: We have welcomed the support local authorities have given the safer cities programme and encouraged their direct involvement in those areas where projects have already been established. We shall continue to seek local authority involvement in the programme as further projects are set up. We have also involved seven local authorities in the two year experiment to test byelaws which prohibit alcohol consumption in particular public places.

78. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the imposition of a duty on all local authorities to undertake crime prevention work.

Mr. John Patten: We have no plans to impose a duty on local authorities to undertake crime prevention work and we have received no representations on this matter.

Charities

75. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he hopes to complete his review of the law on charities.

Mr. John Patten: We hope shortly to publish a White Paper setting out our proposals for legislation in the light of Sir Philip Woodfield's efficiency scrutiny of the supervision of charities.

Police Establishments (Civilians)

80. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the numbers of civilians currently employed in police establishments.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 31 December 1988 there were 39,201 full-time and 6,297 part-time civilian staff employed by the police service in England and Wales.

Armley Prison (Leeds)

81. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he expects the publication of the full report by the deputy director general of prisons on Armley prison, Leeds.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to a question from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) on 10 April at column *325*.

Dog Registration Scheme

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received the Royal Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animal's proposals for a dog registration scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have been asked to reply. The RSPCA sent to the Department its proposals for a dog registration scheme on 3 December 1987. We have no plans to introduce such a scheme.

Sapphire Investigations Bureau

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contracts his Department has placed over the past 10 years with the Sapphire Investigations Bureau.

Mr. Hurd: Records are readily available only from April 1984. They include no contracts placed with, nor payments made to Sapphire Investigations Bureau by or on behalf of my Department during that period.

Horse Racing

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received the feasibility study into the privatisation of the Horserace Totalisator Board; and when he intends to make a statement on the inquiry into the long-term funding of British racing.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that Lloyds merchant bank has completed its work on the feasibility study on the privatisation, and my right hon. Friend expects to receive it soon. As my right hon. Friend explained in reply on 22 March to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) at columns *600-1* he will announce his conclusion on the possibility of an inquiry into the long-term funding of racing when he has considered that advice.

Pompidou Group

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when next the Pompidou Group of Ministers is planning to meet; and what he will be discussing with them.

Mr. Hurd: The next ministerial meeting will take place in London on 18 and 19 May. I hope it will give a powerful encouragement to efforts throughout Europe to pass legislation on the confiscation of drugs traffickers' assets and to establish a network of reciprocal agreements. We shall also be discussing AIDS and drug misuse, which is a major problem in a number of European countries, and the growing threat to Europe posed by cocaine.

Wapping Dispute

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to the number of police officers deployed on public order duties outside the News International plant at Wapping on 24 January 1987; and what were the ranks from commander downwards of those employed, the length of the tours of duty of police officers on that date, and the number of divisions within the Metropolitan district from which officers were drawn.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that 1,018 officers were deployed. Their ranks were as follows:

	Number
Superintendent	1
Chief Inspector	2
Inspector	42
Sergeant	102
Constable	871

A commander and a chief superintendent were initially in charge of police operations; a deputy assistant commissioner subsequently took charge. The average tour of duty was 8·8 hours. No central record was kept of the number of divisions from which officers were drawn.

Prisons (Child Care)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what agencies are allowed to enter prisons to inspect and monitor the arrangements for child care provision.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Health visitors from the local area health authority regularly visit the three mother and baby units and provide child care advice to inmate mothers. Arrangements for a Department of Health team to inspect the units and report periodically on matters such as child care practice are being considered.

Imprisonment (Dependent Children)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research is currently being carried

out into the effects of the imprisonment of a parent who has care of a child on the long-term development of the child.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. Research commissioned by the Home Office into the physical and psychological development of babies in prison, compared with those not subjected to this experience, has recently been published by the university of Sussex. We are not aware of any current research into the long-term effects of imprisonment on prisoners' families.

War Crimes Inquiry

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the war crimes inquiry to submit its report to him on the presence of alleged Nazi war criminals in the United Kingdom

Mr. John Patten: I understand that the inquiry hopes to submit its report to my right hon. Friend in May.

Crimes Against the Person

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest figures for the clearing-up of serious crimes against the person; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hurd: The provisional clear-up rate for offences of violence against the person and sexual offences recorded by the police in England and Wales in 1988 was 75 per cent. This is the same figure as that for 1987. The police rightly give high priority to detecting these types of crime.

"Broadcasting in the '90s"

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in view of the White Paper, "Broadcasting in the '90s," whether he will take steps to protect the rights of charities to continue to have air time allocated for the purpose of making appeals.

Mr. Renton: There is at present no requirement on the broadcasters to allocate air time to charities for the purpose of making appeals. We shall be considering the general question of positive programme requirements in the light of the responses to the White Paper.

Pub Bombings (Demonstration)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) why relatives of the six persons convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings were not permitted to display a banner saying, in English and Russian, "Justice for the Birmingham Six," near the Guildhall during the visit of President Gorbachev;

(2) if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of the City of London police as to the basis on which a demonstration by relatives and friends of the persons convicted of the Guildford and Woolwich bombings near the Guildhall during the visit by President Gorbachev was broken up;

(3) if he will call for a report from the commissioner of the City of London police as to how many persons were arrested or detained during a demonstration by relatives and friends of the persons convicted of the Guildford and Woolwich pub bombings near the Guildhall, during the visit of President Gorbachev; and why.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police for the City of London that a crowd of several hundred were present to see the arrival of President Gorbachev at the Guildhall. A group was chanting and produced a number of banners which obstructed the view of others. The reaction of the rest of the crowd, and the ensuing arguments and jostling, led the police to direct the demonstrators to move on. They did so but resumed their disruptive behaviour nearby. Further police requests to desist were met with abuse and nine arrests were made in order to prevent a breach of the peace. Those concerned were subsequently released without charge.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why relatives of the six persons convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings were not permitted to display in Whitehall a banner saying, in English and Russian, "Justice for the Birmingham Six," during the visit of President Gorbachev to Downing Street.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that to prevent the occasion of the visit turning into a demonstration, which might infringe sessional orders or lead to a breach of the peace, the police did not allow the display of any banners which required two or more people to hold them aloft.

"Women, Children and Custody"

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has received the National Association of Probation Officers' report entitled "Women, Children and Custody", dated March 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have received the report. Policies on the treatment of offenders are kept under review.

Mrs. Riffat Iqbal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mrs. Riffat Iqbal, ref: IMP A421556 and KA55157, applied to the post in Karachi to enter the United Kingdom; when the application was referred to him; and when he expects a decision will be taken on this application.

Mr. Renton: Riffat Iqbal applied for entry clearance as a fiancee at the British Consulate-General, Karachi on 10 December 1987. The entry clearance officer was informed on 2 February 1988 that she had married the sponsor on 10 January 1988 in Pakistan. Mrs. Iqbal was interviewed by the entry clearance officer on 3 July 1988; following further inquiries, the application was referred to the Home Office for a decision on 8 March 1989. The decision to refuse Mrs. Iqbal's application is to be sent to the entry clearance officer in Karachi today; Mrs. Iqbal will be informed of this decision and of her right of appeal to the independent appellate authorities once the papers are received there.

Pet Animals (Protection)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will now sign the European convention for the protection of pet animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to questions from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 1 December at column *1*.

Naturalisation

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures for the revocation of the granting of naturalisation if evidence becomes available that recommendations given in support of the application are unfounded.

Mr. Renton: In circumstances prescribed in section 40 of the British Nationality Act 1981, the Home Secretary may deprive a person of British citizenship obtained by naturalisation or registration if citizenship was obtained by fraud, false representations or the concealment of material fact, provided he is satisfied that it is not conducive to the public good that that person should continue to be a British citizen.

Hosni E Farhat

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration was given to the case of Hosni E. Farhat in reaching the decision to ban the operations of Libyan Arab Airlines from the United Kingdom in October 1986.

Mr. Hurd: None. The case of Farhat, who was sentenced in 1981, was not relevant to the decision, taken in 1986, to terminate flights to the United Kingdom by Libyan Arab Airlines.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement regarding the recommended minimum length of sentence to be served in the case of Hosni E. Farhat;

(2) whether the decision regarding the recommended minimum length of sentence to be served, in the case of Hosni E. Farhat, was made by the Home Secretary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The date of the first formal review by the local review committee of a life sentence prisoner's case is determined by the Secretary of State in the light of advice by the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice on the period of detention necessary to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence in his case, and is normally set three years before the expiry date of that period. Following the judgment of the Divisional Court on 2 March 1987 in R. *v.* Secretary of State for the Home Department ex parte Handscomb and others, the date of the first review in cases where a life sentence is imposed at the discretion of the court rather than as the mandatory penalty for murder is fixed strictly in accordance with the judiciary's advice. The date of the first review in Mr. Farhat's case, which had then already been set, was reviewed following the judgment but there was no reason to change it. His case is due to be reviewed in accordance with these arrangements in 1998, when he will have been detained for 17 years.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Letter Board

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council on whose authority the limit of six letters allowed to be placed by any hon. Member on the Members' letter board at any one time was established; what are the reasons behind this limitation; and if he will review this limitation with a view to its abolition.

Mr. Wakeham: The limit of six letters which right hon. and hon. Members may place on the letter board each day is approved by the Services Committee. Should any greater number be permitted, the handling of urgent mail would be significantly delayed.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council, if he will estimate the cost incurred by the House of hon. Members having to use franked envelopes to communicate with colleagues where they have reached their limit of six unfranked letters on the Members' letter board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: It is not possible to estimate this cost.

Members' Secretaries

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the procedure for hon. Members' private secretaries to claim redundancy payments in the event of the death of the hon. Member by whom they are employed; if he has any plans to change the present arrangements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: On learning of the death of a Member, the Fees Office, having first established that an employee of a late Member is entitled to a statutory redundancy payment under the Employment Protection Consolidation Act 1978, prepare the appropriate documentation in draft which is then forwarded to the peronal representative of the deceased Member (who is legally liable for any redundancy payments due) for factual certification and signature. On receipt of the completed certificates, payment is made by the Fees Office to the employees direct.

I am not aware of any unnecessary administrative delay in settling outstanding redundancy payment claims, or of an alternative method whereby payments might be expedited.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will arrange for the terms and conditions of employment of hon. Members' private secretaries to be reviewed by the Top Salaries Review Body with a view to them being employed by the House and paid a salary specified by the hon. Member for whom they work.

Mr. Wakeham: No. The Top Salaries Review Board last reviewed the office costs allowance, which is payable to Members in respect of certain expenses incurred in carrying out their parliamentary duties including secretarial assistance, in 1987. I see no need for a further review at this stage.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 14 April 1989

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Tanzania

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with other aid Ministers to seek to reschedule overseas debts in Tanzania.

Mr. Chris Patten: In 1979 Britain wrote off all aid debts owed by Tanzania, amounting to some £3·4 million. We have continued to urge others to follow this example for Tanzania and other low-income African countries undertaking programmes of structural adjustment. Tanzania has also benefited from concessional rescheduling of its official debt in the Paris Club, following the agreement reached last summer at the Toronto summit on the basis of the initiative launched by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the present aid projects funded by his Department in Sri Lanka.

Mr. Chris Patten: Our grant aid is largely concentrated on transport, power, natural resources and education. In Colombo we are funding two major projects, to rebuild two main roads and to improve the power distribution network. We are preparing a forestry project. Under our training programme more than 200 Sri Lankans were in Britain last year. From our £20 million relief and reconstruction grant, which is mainly for the north and east, we are providing railway track, double-decker buses, lorries and trucks and finance for the rehabilitation programmes of the Save the Children Fund and Oxfam. Under the aid and trade provision, we are helping to finance the Samanalawewa hydro-electric project, the supply of potable water to three districts and the provision of 600 bus bodies.

Privatisation

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which officials of the Overseas Development Administration have met during the course of 1988 with researchers at the Adam Smith institute, to discuss the possibility of Britain supplying aid and assistance for the privatisation of industries in the developing world; and if he will make a statement;

(2) from whom he has sought advice on matters relating to the possibility of offering British privatisation expertise to Third world nations.

Mr. Chris Patten: There was a range of contacts between officials and outside bodies, including the Adam Smith Institute, concerned with the development of the private sector overseas, including privatisation.

WALES

M4

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when work was last commenced on a new section of the M4 motorway; what has been the increase in traffic on the Baglan-Lonlas area since that time; and if he will reconsider his start dates for this new section of the M4, in particular the new bridge and the connecting road to Baglan.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Work on the most recent section of the M4, the Bridgend northern bypass, started in 1978 and was completed in 1981. Traffic volumes on the A48 between Baglan and Lonlas have increased by some 50 per cent. since 1978 but are still within the design capacity of the road.

The programme set out in "Roads in Wales 1989" for completing the Baglan-Lonlas section by mid 1994 is the most practical one. The Earlswood to Lonlas scheme is planned to start in the current financial year.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total *(a)* central Government and *(b)* local government capital expenditures in each year from 1979-80 to 1987-88, expressed in cash and in real terms, taking 1979-80 as 100.

Mr. Grist: Gross central Government and local authority capital expenditure within my responsibility for the years 1979-80 to 1987-88, taking 1979-80 as 100, is estimated to have been as follows:

	1979-80 £ million	*1980-81* £ million	*1981-82* £ million	*1982-83* £ million	*1983-84* £ million	*1984-85* £ million	*1985-86* £ million	*1986-87* £ million	*1987-88* £ million
(a) Central Government									
(i) Cash terms	100	150	170	187	181	161	173	177	166
(ii) Real terms	100	127	131	134	124	105	107	106	95
(b) Local Government									
(i) Cash terms	*100*	*107*	*107*	*132*	*161*	*145*	*138*	*173*	*195*
(ii) Real terms	*100*	*90*	*82*	*95*	*110*	*95*	*85*	*104*	*111*

The real terms figures have been derived by excluding the effect of general inflation as measured by the gross domestic product deflators at market prices.

For consistency with later years, the figures for central Government expenditure up to 1984-85 have been adjusted to include regional development grant expenditure in Wales. Prior to November 1984, this expenditure was the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry.

Council House Sales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the average cost of council houses sold in Wales regardless of discount, for each year since 1979 to date, and the average monthly cost over each year of the same period of repayment per £1,000 borrowed of mortgages provided by local authorities.

Mr. Grist: The average market price of local authority dwellings sold is given in the following table:

	£
[1]1980	11,012
1981	13,868
1982	13,521
1983	14,562
1984	15,272
1985	16,348
1986	17,448
1987	18,746
1988	20,115

[1] Based on sales from April to December 1980.

The average monthly cost of repayment per £1,000 borrowed of mortgages provided by local authorities is not centrally available.

"Roads in Wales 1989"

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to publish, "Roads in Wales 1989", by the end of April.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: "Roads in Wales 1989" was published on 10 April. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

River Dee Crossing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the start of the new crossing of the river Dee north of Queensferry, as referred to in "Roads in Wales 1989", and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: This is a matter for Clwyd county council.

Council Housing Sales

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, at the latest available date, what was the average selling price after discount of a local authority unit of accommodation; and what is the average cost of building a new local authority unit of accommodation.

Mr. Grist: The average selling price after discount of local authority dwellings sold during 1988 was £9,883. The average cost of building a new local authority unit of accommodation during the same period is estimated to have been £35,450.

Planning Appeal (Clydach)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Inspector has now decided the outcome of the appeal by I. G. Hale, application number 2/2/89/0082/03, relating to the forecourt walls adjoining Ramsay road, and Sunnybank, in the village of Clydach.

Mr. Ian Grist: This application has not come before my right hon. Friend on appeal. I understand that it was approved by Lliw Valley borough council on 16 March 1989.

NFU-FUW (Merger)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a report on the progress he has achieved in his initiative to bring about the merger of the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: As I have previously observed to the hon. Gentleman, the future relationship of the FUW and the NFU in Wales is a matter for those unions and progress towards any merger can be measured only by them.

Farmers Union of Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the dates during 1988 when he met representatives of the Farmers Union of Wales; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Peter Walker: During 1988 I met representatives of the Farmers Union of Wales on four occasions. Dates and details of subjects discussed are as follows:

10 February 1988—To discuss a wide range of agricultural subjects including extensification, stabilisers and milk quotas.

10 May 1988—Speech to the FUW annual general meeting about sheepmeat regime and general matters of interest to the agriculture industry.

19 July 1988—At the Royal Welsh show to discuss general subjects of current interest to the agriculture sector.

20 October 1988—To discuss hill livestock compensatory review.

National Farmers Union

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the dates during 1988 when he met representatives of the National Farmers Union; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Peter Walker: During 1988 I met representatives of the National Farmers Union (Wales) on five occasions. Dates and details of subjects discussed are as follows:

30 March 1988—To discuss a range of agricultural issues.

19 July 1988—At the Royal Welsh show to discuss general subjects of current interest to the agriculture sector.

27 October 1988—To discuss hill livestock compensatory allowances review with the NFU (Wales).

27 October 1988—To discuss the HLCA review.

8 December 1988—To discuss a range of agricultural issues.

School Meals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for each education authority and for Wales as a whole the 1988 figures for the percentage of schoolchildren *(a)* taking purchased school meals, *(b)* taking free school meals and *(c)* taking school meals in total.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information in respect of 1988 is in the following table:

Percentage of schoolchildren present: Taking school meals

	Purchased	*Free*	*Total*
Clwyd	35·6	10·7	46·3
Dyfed	51·3	12·5	63·8
Gwent	39·0	16·3	55·3
Gwynedd	43·0	13·8	58·8
Mid Glamorgan	34·4	17·5	51·9
Powys	50·8	5·4	56·2
South Glamorgan	25·6	16·5	42·1
West Glamorgan	33·6	15·6	49·2
Wales	37·4	14·6	52·0

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give for September 1988 for each health district and for Wales in total the waiting list figures for *(a)* urgent in-patients, *(b)* non-urgent in-patients, *(c)* urgent in-patients waiting a month or more, *(d)* non-urgent in-patients waiting a year of more, *(e)* out-patients and *(f)* out-patients waiting three months or more.

Mr. Grist: Comprehensive information about waiting lists at 30 September 1988 will be published in Welsh Hospital Waiting List Bulletin 1989, No. 1, during the week beginning 15 May 1989.

Local Development Projects

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what local development projects have been undertaken in Wales; and what are their costs.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 11 April 1989]:* The following list gives details of local development projects since the initiative began in Wales in November 1986:

	Contractor	*Description*	*Cost £ ('000)*
1.	British Coal Enterprise, Cardiff	Small Firms' Training Needs	18
2.	Cambrian Manpower Development Unit, Aberystwyth	Environmental Training Needs in Industry in Wales	5
3.	Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	Training Study of South Glamorgan Labour Market	18·775
4.	Cardiff Chamber of Commerce	Cardiff Training Development Project	25
5.	Carmarthen College of Technology and Art	Organic Farming	46·7
6.	Nature Conservancy Council	Environmental Manpower Project	12
7.	People and Work Unit, Newport	Small Businesses	30
8.	Swansea College of Further Education	Learning Skills for Adults	20
9.	Swansea College of Further Education	Learning Skills for the Unemployed	25·224
10.	Welsh Joint Education Committee	Tourism	20
11.	Gwent Local Employer Network	Consultancy Survey	7·9
12.	Cardiff Chamber of Commerce II	Dissemination of Good Practices from 1st LDP	13·9
13.	People and Work Unit Newport	Training Needs of Business for Community Benefit	28·2
14.	Cardiff Media City	Identification of Training Needs in Media	10

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Meals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give from the 1988 census the latest figures for uptake of school meals, giving for each education authority the percentage of children taking *(a)* purchased meals, *(b)* free meals and *(c)* meals in total.

Mr. Butcher: The figures are given in the table. They relate to maintained primary, secondary and special schools and are based on the numbers of pupils present in schools on the day in October 1988 on which the survey was carried out.

The full results of the survey are contained in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publication "School Meals Statistics at October 1988" which will shortly be available in the Library.

Number of pupils

Local education authority	*Taking paid meals*	*Taking free meals*	*Percentage Taking meals in total*
ILEA	39·3	28·6	68·0
Barking and Dagenham	28·9	10·2	39·1
Barnet	51·0	8·0	59·0
Bexley	25·6	5·9	31·5
Brent	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bromley	33·2	5·7	38·9
Croydon	36·9	8·4	45·3
Ealing	32·3	12·7	45·1
Enfield	32·0	8·2	40·2
Haringey	33·6	19·5	53·1
Harrow	44·9	4·7	49·5
Havering	29·7	4·6	34·3
Hillingdon	37·0	6·4	43·5
Hounslow	51·0	10·3	61·3
Kingston-upon-Thames	39·4	4·9	44·3
Merton	24·6	6·7	31·3
Newham	22·7	17·1	39·8
Redbridge	38·6	5·9	44·5
Richmond upon Thames	24·9	5·8	30·7
Sutton	46·8	4·6	51·3
Waltham Forest	33·4	16·2	49·7
Bolton	38·0	15·3	53·4
Bury	35·9	11·3	47·2
Manchester	n/a	n/a	n/a
Oldham	34·1	19·1	53·2
Rochdale	36·5	18·7	55·2
Salford	36·9	24·1	61·0
Stockport	33·1	10·0	43·1
Tameside	38·6	15·1	53·7
Trafford	37·6	13·0	50·6
Wigan	33·9	13·4	47·3
Knowsley	13·7	38·8	52·4
Liverpool	n/a	n/a	n/a
St. Helens	40·7	16·6	57·3
Sefton	29·0	17·4	46·4
Wirral	31·3	21·4	52·7
Barnsley	47·7	16·2	63·8
Doncaster	50·5	18·2	68·7
Rotherham	34·2	16·8	50·9
Sheffield	34·4	19·4	53·8
Gateshead	36·5	20·4	56·9
Newcastle upon Tyne	30·3	30·4	60·7
North Tyneside	44·9	17·8	62·7
South Tyneside	35·5	21·6	57·0
Sunderland	34·9	22·6	57·5
Birmingham	27·8	26·3	54·2

Local education authority	*Taking paid meals*	*Taking free meals*	*Taking meals in total*
Coventry	23·3	19·9	43·2
Dudley	26·7	12·6	39·3
Sandwell	29·3	19·1	48·5
Solihull	34·4	9·7	44·0
Walsall	38·2	18·3	56·5
Wolverhampton	16·9	18·1	35·0
Bradford	34·7	21·0	55·7
Calderdale	40·9	12·9	53·9
Kirklees	n/a	n/a	n/a
Leeds	40·6	14·7	55·4
Wakefield	48·5	13·8	62·3
Avon	29·5	10·6	40·1
Bedfordshire	38·7	9·4	48·1
Berkshire	36·0	4·9	40·9
Buckinghamshire	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cambridgeshire	26·6	6·4	33·0
Cheshire	37·0	11·1	48·1
Cleveland	42·5	24·9	67·5
Cornwall	41·3	9·2	50·4
Cumbria	48·7	9·4	58·1
Derbyshire	62·5	10·5	73·0
Devon	40·8	11·0	51·8
Dorset	17·3	4·4	21·8
Durham	45·9	16·2	62·1
East Sussex	34·1	8·0	42·1
Essex	29·6	6·5	36·1
Gloucestershire	23·0	6·9	29·9
Hampshire	24·4	6·6	31·0
Hereford and Worcester	19·4	6·6	26·0
Hertfordshire	44·8	5·1	49·8
Humberside	35·9	14·4	50·3
Isle of Wight	35·0	10·4	45·5
Kent	35·1	7·0	42·1
Lancashire	36·7	13·9	50·6
Leicestershire	31·7	8·9	40·6
Lincolnshire	17·1	6·0	23·1
Norfolk	26·7	9·4	36·1
Northamptonshire	26·6	7·2	33·8
Northumberland	44·7	9·7	54·4
North Yorkshire	43·7	6·3	50·0
Nottinghamshire	34·0	14·0	48·0
Oxfordshire	37·7	4·8	42·6
Shropshire	41·3	10·5	51·8
Somerset	34·3	5·7	40·0
Staffordshire	30·9	9·8	40·6
Suffolk	39·9	6·7	46·7
Surrey	41·2	3·7	44·9
Warwickshire	28·5	7·3	35·8
West Sussex	40·6	4·1	44·8
Wiltshire	31·7	5·5	37·1
Isles of Scilly	5·5	0·9	6·4

n/a = Not available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions have taken place as to the feasibility of introducing an employee share ownership scheme in any future privatisation that his Department may sponsor.

Mr. Viggers: On 22 March 1989, heads of agreement were approved for the sale of Harland and Wolff plc to a management-employee buy-out team backed by Mr. Olsen. Employees of Harland and Wolff plc will have an opportunity to acquire shares in the new company. The Government have to date had no discussions on the feasibility of introducing an employee share ownership scheme in the context of the privatisations of Short Brothers plc and Northern Ireland Electricity.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many privately held *(a)* shotguns, *(b)* ·22 rifles, *(c)* rifles of larger calibre, *(d)* hand-guns, *(e)* air and gas-operated weapons and *(f)* antique firearms, have been lost or stolen each year from 1976 to the latest available date; how many of each such category were subsequently recovered; and how many in each category are known to have been used in criminal, including terrorist, activity or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* Information is not readily available in the form requested. However, such information as is available is contained in the following tables.

Table 1
Firearms stolen from civilians

Year	*Shotguns*	*Rifles*[1]	*Pistols/ revolvers*	*Antiques*	*Air weapons*
1976	128	23	8	1	18
1977	53	8	8	—	7
1978	35	3	3	—	3
1979	34	3	2	—	7
1980	38	7	—	2	8
1981	69	7	8	2	13
1982	60	9	13	2	5
1983	64	4	13	4	8
1984	78	4	11	1	9
1985	79	11	8	—	9
1986	96	9	4	—	20
1987	91	17	17	—	13
1988	59	6	10	—	9
[2]1989	7	4	2	—	—

[1] Including ·22 calibre.
[2] To 21 March.

Table 2
Firearms stolen from civilians and recovered between 1976 and 1989 (to 21 March)

Shotguns	*Rifles*	*Pistols/ revolvers*	*Antiques*	*Air weapons*
365	30	41	—	31

Rating Reform

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have to introduce a poll tax in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Stewart *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The Green Paper of January 1986 "Paying for Local Government", which formed the basis for the Great Britain reforms, made it clear that the proposals did not apply to Northern Ireland. This reflected the fact that local government arrangements in Northern Ireland are significantly different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom and we have no present plans to replace the existing system.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe (Delegation)

Mr. Page: To ask the Prime Minister if she will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the 41st session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The Prime Minister: The 41st Session Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 8 May 1989. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the session will consist of 11 Members of the Conservative party, six Members of the Labour party and one Member of the Social and Liberal Democrats party. I have also appointed a number of substitute delegates.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the leaders of those parties concerned.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the assembly of the Western European Union, which next meets in Paris on 5 June.

Representatives from the Government Benches will be:
My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir Geoffrey Finsberg—who will act as leader of both delegations
The hon. Members for:
Warwick and Leamington (Sir Dudley Smith)
Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill) (Government Whip)
Twickenham (Mr. Jessel)
Northampton, South (Mr. Morris)
Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir John Stokes)
Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson)
Ashford (Mr. Speed)
Streatham (Sir William Shelton)
Medway (Dame Peggy Fenner)
and the Earl of Kinnoull
Representatives from the Labour party will be:
The hon. Members for:
Neath (Mr. Coleman)
Wallsend (Mr. Garrett)
Wentworth (Mr. Hardy)
Tooting (Mr. Cox)
Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry)
Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing)
Representatives from the Social and Liberal Democrats party will be:
The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir Russell Johnston)
The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates
From the Government Benches:
The hon. Members for:
Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson)
Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)
Norfolk North (Mr. Howell)
Thanet, North (Mr. Gale)
Lewes (Mr. Rathbone)
Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden)
Suffolk Central (Mr. Lord)
Ravensbourne (Mr. Hunt)
Lord Newall
and Lord Rodney
From the Labour party:
The hon. Members for:
Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson)
Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland)
Don Valley (Mr. Redmond)
Warley, East (Mr. Faulds)
Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks)
Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie)
and Lord Kirkhill
From the Social and Liberal Democrats party:
The Lord Mackie of Benshie

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the fall in unemployment during the last 12 months for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In March 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the United Kingdom was 1,918,100 compared with 2,453,900 in March 1988—a fall of 535,800 or 21·8 per cent. on a consistent basis.

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which areas he now considers to have a labour shortage.

Mr. Cope: Thanks to the very strong growth in employment, unemployment rates have been falling since July 1986. By March 1989 there were 48 travel-to-work area with unemployment rates below 4 per cent. and 16 travel-to-work areas below 3 per cent.

As unemployment has fallen, some shortages of labour have appeared. Occupations most in demand are in higher level skills such as professional engineers, computer specialists and managers and in craft skills.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide a breakdown of the £55 million surplus of the construction industry training board; what information he has as to what this sum will be spent on; why the board has £74 million invested in financial institutions; on what authority the board makes such investments; and when this authority was last reviewed.

Mr. Nicholls: The latest available accounts are for the financial year ending 31 March 1988. Detailed information is included in the 1987-88 annual report, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Section 17(5) of the Industrial Training Act 1982 permits a board to invest any money in a manner approved by the Training Commission. The latest advice was given to all industry training boards in October 1986 when certain categories of investment were given general approval by the commission.

The board will need to draw substantially upon its accumulated fund in order to finance training commitments already entered into and its planned increase in training effort to meet skill shortages which prevail in the industry.

European Social Fund (Cornwall)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what technical queries he received from the European Commission regarding the European social fund applications for 1989 by Cornwall county council; what steps were taken to answer those technical queries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: My Department was advised by the European Commission that Cornwall county council's 1989 European social fund applications, in common with over 150 other UK applications, were being rejected

because the Commission considered that the expenditure costs quoted were too high and not sufficiently justified for the type of training being given.

Officials from my Department made representations to the Commission on behalf of all the applicants so affected, but have not so far been successful in changing the Commission's decision.

Because of the difficulties that the rejection to these applications is causing Cornwall county council, my Department has written again to the European Commission with a request that the social fund applications be reviewed.

Training Managers

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the largest 100 companies which have contracted directly as training managers under the employment training scheme.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* This information is not available in the form requested. Organisations are contracted as training managers by their capability to provide and meet employment training standards, and not by their size. I am sending the hon. Member a list of all private sector firms acting as training managers as at 20 February 1989 and am also arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Visual Display Units

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in view of the steadily increasing use of visual displays units, when he expects to recommend standards to be introduced, especially with regard to the adoption of the ALARA principle of keeping radiation exposure as low as reasonably achievable.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* The introduction of such standards for VDUs is unnecessary as these machines do not pose a radiation risk. I hope that national and international standards on some ergonomic aspects of VDUs will be published within a year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Glasgow Passport Office

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current average waiting time at Glasgow passport office between the receipt of *(a)* an application for a passport and *(b)* an application for renewal of an existing passport and the issue of the new passport.

Mr. Renton: Straightforward non-urgent postal applications of all types are being processed at the Glasgow passport office in an average of 33 working days. Urgent applications are given priority and are processed in accordance with travellers' requirements.

Newchurch Hospital

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the survey into the possible use of Newchurch hospital, as a prison, took place; and what conclusions were reached.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Newchurch hospital is not being considered as a possible site for a prison establishment and no such survey has been made.

Horse Racing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, following the deaths of four horses and injury to others at Aintree racecourse on 8 April, he will consider instituting proceedings against the racecourse authorities under the provisions of the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. The prosecution of offenses is not the responsibility of my right hon. Friend. If the hon. Member believes he has evidence that an offence has been committed, he should communicate it to the chief officer of police concerned.

Prison Officers

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether new applicants are being accepted for work as prison officers in the north-west of England.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. For the time being, the prison service in England and Wales is recruiting only for posts in London and the south-east. All applicants are therefore invited to confirm that they are willing and able to work at any establishment in that area.

Satellite Information Services

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the increased percentage stake in Satellite Information Services which has been recently announced for the Horserace Totalisator Board; and on what terms it will be allocated.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that the board may increase its shareholding in Satellite Information Services from 5 to 6 per cent. and will be entitled to purchase these additional shares at the same price per share as that achieved for those shares in the company which are to be made available in a private placing.

Firearms Consultative Committee

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the membership of the Firearms consultative committee.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) yesterday.

Lindholme Prison (Use of Body Belts)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of a body belt on an inmate at Lindholme prison in 1987.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A governor may order an inmate in a prison service establishment to be put under restraint in a body belt where this is necessary to prevent the inmate from injuring himself or others, damaging property or creating a disturbance. The prison medical officer must be informed whenever a governor orders an inmate to be put under restraint.

On the one occasion in 1987 when a body belt was used at Lindholme prison, the inmate had attempted to commit suicide. His behaviour was aggressive and unpredictable and he was placed in a body belt for his own protection, with the full knowledge and agreement of the medical officer. The body belt was removed after 2 hours 20 minutes prior to his transfer to Leeds prison hospital for observation.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions body belts have been used on inmates of Lindholme prison since 1987; what category of prisoner was involved in each case; and for how long the device was applied on each occasion.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Body belts were used to restrain prisoners at Lindholme prison on one occasion in 1987 and twice in 1988. The prisoners were all in category C and were kept in body belts for an average of 1 hour 45 minutes.

Prostitution

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many men have been convicted at South West London magistrates court for kerb-crawling activities in the Bedford Hill area of Wandsworth during the last three years;

(2) how many people have been convicted at South West London magistrates court in each of the last three years for living off the immoral earnings of prostitutes;

(3) how many convictions there have been at South West London magistrates court of women convicted of soliciting for prostitution in the Bedford hill district of Wandsworth during the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: The information held centrally, which may be incomplete, is given in the table. It is not possible to identify separately those offences which occurred in the Bedford hill area of Wandsworth. Information for 1985 and 1986 was provided in a reply given to a question from the hon. Member on 12 November 1987 at column *206*.

Persons found guilty of offences relating to prostitution at South Western magistrates court

Offence	*1987*
Kerb-crawling	—
Soliciting for prostitution	399
Living on earnings of prostitution	—

Immigration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a list, broken down by port of entry, of the number of occasions since the latest immigration guidelines were introduced that hon. Members have made representations to immigration officials to change their decision to refuse entry and the number of times the immigration officials have agreed to do so.

Mr. Renton: The information is not available in the form requested. The available information about requests to immigration officers to defer removal following refusal of leave to enter was contained in my reply to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 15 March at column *231*.

Rates (Non-payment)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in the area including Nottingham *(a)* were imprisoned, *(b)* had attachments to earnings, and *(c)* had distraint warrants issued for non-payments of rates in each of the years from 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Estimates of numbers of rate defaulters committed to custody by courts in Nottinghamshire are given in the table below; provision of information for other years would involve disproportionate cost. Information on attachment of earnings orders and distraint warrants is not recorded centrally.

Committals to custody for non-payment of rates by courts in Nottinghamshire

	Estimated number
1979	20
1983	20
1987	10
1988	5

Tamil Refugees

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of applications at his Department from Tamils from Sri Lanka seeking to be granted refugee status in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: No distinction is made in statistical records between Tamils and other Sri Lankans. For the latest available information, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 11 January 1989 at column *683*.

Attempted Murder

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the average recommended minimum length of sentence to be served, in cases of attempted murder in each year since 1979.

Mr. John Patten: The information is not collected centrally.

Disabled Persons (Voting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he is having with election returning officers in the United Kingdom to ensure that access is possible for disabled people at all polling stations in their areas.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None at this time. Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by the Representation of the People Act 1985, places a particular obligation on district and London borough councils to designate as polling places, so far as is reasonable and practicable, only places which are accessible to disabled voters. This requirement is supplemented by Home Office guidance to returning officers, which states that the long-term objective should be to have polling stations which are all capable of easy access by disabled people, and that the Treasury will provide grants towards the cost of portable ramps so that wheelchairs can enter polling stations easily.

Children (Employment)

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to the answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *327-38*, he will place in the Library anonymised summaries of the convictions for officers in connection with the employment of children in *(a)* non-industrial, *(b)* industrial and *(c)* agricultural undertakings for the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make it his policy to make such summaries available in future years.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 10 April 1989]:* The available information relates to prosecutions in 1987 under sections 18, 19, 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 notified to the Home Office. There were eight such prosecutions and eight convictions, all leading to fines and no other disposals. Equivalent figures for 1988 will become available later in the year and can be made available on request.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Late Night Sittings (Costs)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what estimate he has made of the costs of keeping the House open for sittings which go beyond 10 pm.

Mr. Wakeham: When a sitting of the House goes beyond 10 pm a wide diversity of costs are incurred. Information on these costs is either not held centrally or not separately identifiable. The information requested, therefore, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Monetary System

Mr. Meale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions there have been major currency realignments within the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system; and if he will give the relevant dates and adjustments.

Mr. Lilley: There have been 11 realignments of the currencies in the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system since its inception in 1979. Details are set out in the Commission booklet, "The EMS: Ten Years of Progress in European Monetary Co-operation", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Alcohol

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest estimated receipts in 1988-89 and 1989-90 from excise duties and value added tax on spirits, beer, wine, made-wine, cider, perry and low-duty alcohol products, respectively.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* The information is as follows:

	1988-89[1]			*1989-90*[2]		
	Excise duties £ billion	*VAT £ billion*	*Total receipts £ billion*	*Excise duties £ billion*	*VAT £ billion*	*Total receipts £ billion*
Spirits	1·6	0·6	2·2	1·7	0·7	2·3
Beer	2·1	1·3	3·4	2·1	1·4	3·5
Wine	0·7	0·5	1·2	0·8	0·5	1·3
Made wine	0·1	[3]—	0·1	0·1	[3]—	0·1
Cider and perry	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1	0·1
TOTALS	4·5	2·4	7·0	4·7	2·6	7·3

[1] Latest estimates.
[2] Forecasts.
[3] Below £50 million.
Note: Separate figures are not available for low duty alcohol products.
Individual items may not add up to totals due to rounding.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Libya

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom citizens are *(a)* currently serving sentences and *(b)* awaiting sentencing in Libyan prisons.

Mr. Eggar: There are no British nationals known to be currently detained in Libya.

USSR (Cultural Co-operation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he is having with the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics wih a view to a greater exchange of cultural co-operation between Great Britain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Waldegrave: Anglo-Soviet cultural exchanges have developed considerably in recent years. During Mr. Gorbachev's recent visit we agreed to start negotiations on a new, more wide-ranging cultural agreement, which we hope to sign next year. The agreement will set out the basic principles of our co-operation and will in due course lead to the establishment of cultural centres in London and Moscow, with guaranteed free and unimpeded public access.

Tourism (Eastern Europe)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has as to what agreements exist for tourism between Britain and countries in eastern Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are no agreements at Government level on tourism between Britain and

countries in eastern Europe. The Vienna concluding document, which those countries have accepted, calls for improvement of the infrastructure of tourism, removal of restrictive measures that hinder its development, and the encouragement of individual travel. Her Majesty's Government attach importance to the fulfilment of these provisions.

Human Rights (Tibet)

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of China about the abuse of human rights in Tibet.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 22 March to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Steel) at column *621*.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will arrange for the British post in Bombay to issue a visit visa to Mrs. Sakina Najmuddin Badruddin so that she can join her family in paying respects to her father who died in the United Kingdom last December;

(2) when Mr. Latifa Begum, who was born on 7 March 1955, and her four children, applied to the British post in New Delhi for entry clearance to enter the United Kingdom; and when they will be interviewed;

(3) why Mrs. Zaffar Iqbal Raja, ref. V 431489, was refused a visa by the British post inIslamabad to visit the United Kingdom; what is Mr. Raja's occupation and family circumstances; and if he will reconsider Mr. Raja's application.

Mr. Eggar: In accordance with the recent guidelines on the handling of representations by Members of Parliament in immigration cases, issued to Members on 14 December 1988, I have referred the question to the correspondence unit of migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The hon. Member will receive a reply from the unit in due course.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Old Age Expenditure Programmes

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list showing expenditure on programmes for old age as a proportion of gross domestic product at market prices, for European Community member states, for each year since 1983.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The most recent information is as follows:

	1983	*1984*	*1985*
Belgium	7·8	7·8	—
Denmark	10·2	10·2	10·1
Federal Republic of Germany	8·0	7·8	—
Greece	—	—	—
Spain	—	—	—
France	9·1	—	—
Ireland	5·7	5·6	5·5
Italy	7·7	7·7	7·6
Luxembourg	6·7	—	—
Netherlands	8·8	—	—
Portugal	—	—	—
United Kingdom	9·5	9·6	—

Source: Eurostat.
Note: Social protection expenditure for old age comprises state pension, occupational pensions, income related benefits and public expenditure on residential care..

Social Security Act 1988

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in percentage terms the number of applications to him under the hardship clause of the Social Security Act 1988 *(a)* submitted through each Department of Social Security local office and *(b)* submitted on a Department of Social Security regional basis, which are successful in their intent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Family Credit

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the television-based advertising campaign for family credit will be launched; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The family credit television campaign started yesterday and will run throughout Great Britain for eight weeks until 7 June. This phase of the campaign will cost 2·3 million. In addition, an outdoor campaign on posters and bus sides will commence throughout Great Britain on 1 May for two months until the end of June. The total cost of this aspect of the campaign will be £1·3 million. A further £1 million has been allocated for other promotional activities during the remainder of this financial year. These will include providing adequate supplies of leaflets and posters in sub-post offices, community and health centres and other places used frequently by mothers with children.

The campaign emphasises working families' eligibility for family credit, including those with take-home pay levels as high as £175 per week in some cases. It sets out to dispel misconceptions about ineligibility for family credit because of home ownership, self-employment and lone parent status, and points out that it is a weekly tax-free payment and not a loan.

We have already arranged for a copy of the advertising research on which the campaign is based to be placed in the Library.

Young Persons (Benefits)

Mr. McCrindle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what period 16 and 17-year-olds estranged from their parents will be able to claim income support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Regulations have yet to be made, but we intend that 16 and 17-year-olds who are estranged from their parents will be eligible to receive income support during the same period as the child benefit extension period—that is, until the end of the calendar year for

summer school leavers and for 12 weeks in the case of those leaving at Christmas or Easter. During that time the guarantee of an offer of a YTS place will be met. Once eligibility for income support on this basis runs out, the "severe hardship" provision will be available where necessary. Those not required to be available for work or training will continue to be eligible for income support at all times.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how he proposes that the housing benefit will reflect the community charge in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: From April 1990, help for people on low income in paying the community charge will be provided through a community charge benefit scheme. This will be separate from the housing benefit scheme, though the rules of the two schemes will be aligned as closely as is possible. The local authority associations and the Social Security Advisory Committee are now being consulted on draft Community Charge Benefits (General) Regulations.

Rating Reform

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the memorandum from his Department to which reference is made in the *Evening Times* article of 10 April, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The document referred to was only interim advice. Full instructions to local offices will be issued in the near future and I will arrange for a copy of these to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether under S.I. No. 507 (S.59) any deduction for poll tax payments from persons on income support can be made by his Department without its first having received a specific request, naming an individual or couple, from the levying authority.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The levying authority must first have obtained a summary warrant in respect of the debt.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy on imposing deductions of poll tax payments from persons on income support before appeals have been dealt with by a tribunal.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: If an appeal is made, deductions will continue pending the tribunal's decision.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the spokeswoman referred to in the article printed in the *Evening Times*, a copy of which has been sent to him, had his authority to state that a person on income support could be left with 10p of an income due to deductions arising from non-payment of the poll tax; and if he will provide an example of how this can happen.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The provision for 10p to remain in payment is in regulation 2 of the Community Charges (Deductions from Income Support) (Scotland) Regulations (SI 1989 No. 507) and derives from the provision in paragraph 2 of schedule 9 to the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 (SI 1987 No. 1968) dealing with other deductions from income support for debts to third parties. Its purpose is to avoid extinguishment of entitlement. For example, the deduction for a single person will be £1·75p a week. If the person's income support is less than £1·85p per week because of other income, the deduction for community charge arrears could not be made.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the maximum weekly deduction for non-payment of the poll tax from *(a)* a single person aged 18 years, *(b)* a single person aged 25 years, and *(c)* a married couple, all receiving full income support and without savings, and assuming they have no other deductions for housing and fuel.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows:

(a) and *(b)* £1·75p a week; *(c)* £2·75p a week if both partners are debtors to the levying authority.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the powers of his Department to deduct sums from income support where the recipient has failed to pay his or her poll tax are subject to a time to pay direction under the Debtor (Scotland) Act 1987.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. In terms of the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 (as amended by the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987) section 1(5)(ee), the court cannot make a time direction in an action by or on behalf of a levying authority for the payment of any community charge.

DEFENCE

RAF (Front-line Aircraft)

Mr. Allan Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the Royal Air Force's front-line aircraft is not fully operational.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It has been the policy of successive Governments not to provide detailed information about the operational readiness of elements of the armed forces. All Royal Air Force aircraft assigned to operational duties are fully manned and equipped and thus able to undertake their designated missions.

US Competitive Strategies Doctrine

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his *(a)* Belgian, *(b)* Canadian, *(c)* Danish, *(d)* French, *(e)* Greek, *(f)* Norwegian, *(g)* Spanish and *(h)* West German counterparts regarding the United States' new competitive strategies doctrine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Near Miss (Somerset)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received of an alleged near miss by two low-flying military aircraft over Cannington, Somerset, on Friday 7 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: There has been no report of an alleged airmiss involving military aircraft over Cannington, Somerset, on Friday 7 April.

TRANSPORT

M40 (Southern Extension)

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement as to the tender process and timings he intents to adopt for the southern section of the M40 extension.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We plan to invite competitive tenders later this month and to expedite our normal arrangements for their submission and evaluation. Subject to the outcome and to the satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures this should enable construction to start this summer.

The contract will include provision for a bonus for early completion and a charge for late completion in relation to the contractor's own tendered period. This should ensure completion of the M40 as soon as practicable.

Roads (Investment)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the amount of road investment in the United Kingdom, France and West Germany for each of the last five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The information readily available is as follows:

Capital expenditure on road infrastructure
National currency—millions

	United Kingdom	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*France*
1983	1,425	13,550	26,900
1984	1,570	13,450	28,800
1985	1,678	13,250	35,700
1986	1,801	14,500	37,800
1987	1,871	—	—

Exchange rates taken from CSO "Economic Trends"

	DM	*FF*
1983	3·870	11·5471
1984	3·791	11·6349
1985	3·784	11·5494
1986	3·193	10·1569
1987	—	—

Sterling— millions

	United Kingdom	*Federal Republic of Germany*	*France*
1983	1,425	3,501	2,330
1984	1,570	3,548	2,475
1985	1,678	3,502	3,091
1986	1,801	4,555	3,722
1987	1,871	—	—

The information for the United Kingdom and West Germany comes from the latest ECMT publication "Statistical Trends in Transport". That for France was obtained from the statistical office of the French Transport Ministry in November 1988. ECMT is currently collecting the relevant information for 1987—it should be available in the autumn.

Railway Stations (Staff and Information)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations has he received from commuters about lack of staff and information at British Rail stations; whether he has any plans to alter the quality of service objectives set for British Rail to take account of these representations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* We regularly receive representations on all aspects of the quality of service of British Rail. There are already quality of service objectives covering train enquiry bureaux and queuing times at ticket offices. Staffing matters generally are the responsibility of the British Railways Board and we have no plans to introduce objectives to cover staffing levels at stations.

Trains (Overcrowding)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to change British Rail's quality of service objectives to seek a reduction in overcrowding on trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* We are discussing with BR new quality of service objectives for the provincial sector. We shall be reviewing BR's other quality of service standards in setting new objectives for the period from 1990 to 1993.

The Government have approved increasing levels of investment to reduce overcrowding and to meet the agreed quality of service objectives on all passenger sectors.

British Rail (Service Objectives)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the extent to which British Rail is meeting the quality of service objectives set by him with regard to train punctuality and cancellations.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* The results available to the Department for the first three quarters of the financial year 1988-89 are as follows:

Percentage

	Punctuality			Reliability	
	Objective	Within in minutes of timetable	Attainment	Objective (services to run)	Attainment
Inter City	90·0	10	87·3	99·5	99·0
Network SouthEast	90·0	5	91·3	99·0	98·7
Provincial	85·0 to 97·0	5	[1]90·0	98·5	99·0

[1] On average.

Trains (Cleaning)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to change British Rail's quality of service objectives to take account of the need for improved standards of cleaning on British Rail trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 13 April 1989]* We have no plans to change British Rail's carriage cleaning objectives. BR is making every effort to achieve the standards that have already been agreed.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Edible Dormice

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the estimated cost to his Department of administering his scheme to control the numbers of edible dormice.

Mr. Ryder: Licences to trap edible dormice are issued as a small part of my Department's general licensing responsibilities under the Widlife and Countryside Act 1981. There is no specific scheme of control. The administrative cost of issuing licences in 1989 is estimated at £80.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the damage inflicted to the commercial timber industry by the six edible dormice, the destruction of which he authorised in 1988.

Mr. Ryder: Damage to commercial woodland by edible dormice is assessed by local Ministry biologists. The dormice strip off bark, mainly from larch trees. Such damage occurs in very localised areas but can considerably reduce the long-term value of the stands of trees affected. The success of control varies markedly from year to year but actual trapping occurs only when damage becomes apparent and local Ministry staff have been notified.

European Monetary System

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has made any assessment of the impact on British agriculture of Britain becoming a member of the European monetary system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The United Kingdom is already a member of the European monetary system (EMS). Were we to join the exchange rate mechanism (ERM) of the EMS, within what is known as narrow-band divergence limits, there would be implications for the monetary compensatory amounts (MCAs) applied to trade in agricultural products.

Currently MCAs applied in the United Kingdom can vary weekly if sterling's market exchange rate varies. If we joined the ERM, our MCAs would become fixed, changing only at EMS realignments or following changes in the "green rates" which apply to the conversion of ECU prices into sterling. The green rates themselves would not be directly affected by membership of the ERM, and changes to them would continue to be subject to decisions by the Council. Joining the ERM would not, in itself, affect our CAP support level, expressed in sterling, either way.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on how many occasions during 1988 cattle submitted for slaughter at European Economic Community export approved slaughterhouses were identified by ante-mortem veterinary inspections as bovine spongiform encephalopathy suspect; and in how many of these cases bovine spongiform encephalopathy subsequently was confirmed by post-mortem inspection.

(2) how many cattle entered for slaughter at non-EEC export approved slaughterhouses during 1988 were found, on inspection, to be infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy;

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* We consider this monitoring very important indeed. It is essential that no animals slip through. There has been no evidence of negligence. Thorough inspection has resulted in 63 suspect cases of BSE, 40 of which were subsequently confirmed, being reported from markets and slaughterhouse from 21 June 1988, when the disease was made notifiable, to the end of the year. During this period a total of 2,186 cases were confirmed.

Sheep Dipping

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his proposals for compulsory sheep dipping in 1989.

Mr. Donald Thompson *[holding answer 7 April 1989]:* The Government have examined the arrangements for controlling sheep scab with a view to securing effective regulation while avoiding unnecessary burdens on the industry.

It has been decided that there will be a single compulsory national dip in the autumn of 1989 and a further dip in the autumn of 1990. A system of movement controls will be introduced following this autumn's dip and arrangements for 1991 onwards will be decided in the light of the effectiveness of the new measures. The dates of the compulsory dip will be announced after consultation with the industry.

HEALTH

Meningitis

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year for the last 10 years and to date for 1989, the number of cases of meningitis treated in the Trent regional health authority, the years in which there were clusters, the number of fatal cases and the number of cases involving children under five years and of school age.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available in the precise form requested. In particular, data on clustering of cases within a local authority area are not available, since addresses are not noted on the infectious disease notification reports sent by regional health authorities to the OPCS.

The tables show the nearest equivalent readily available data.

Table A

Number of cases of (a) all forms of meningitis (b) meningococcal meningitis notified in Trent Regional Health Authority, 1979-89[1] all ages and selected age-groups.

Notifications

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	[1]1989
Acute Meningitis All forms											
All ages	84	74	93	104	91	103	135	170	186	309	71
0—4	30	28	30	42	47	48	56	88	79	117	41
5—14	25	12	25	19	16	15	21	26	37	39	5
Acute Meningococcal Meningitis											
All ages	58	76	27	26	41	33	44	69	72	111	33
0—4	28	39	14	11	22	15	23	34	43	61	17
5—14	15	25	6	7	7	2	9	9	9	15	3

[1] 1 January-31 March (1988 and 1989 provisional).

Table B

Number of deaths with meningococcal infection[1] as underlying cause of death, usual residents of Trent Regional Health Authority, all ages and selected age-groups, 1979-1987.

Deaths

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987
Meningococcal Infection									
All ages	11	11	6	4	14	6	11	10	15
0—4	6	4	4	2	7	1	7	8	7
5—14	1	2	—	1	1	—	—	—	1

[1] International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 9th Revision 036·0

Table C[2]

Numbers (10 per cent. sample) of hospital inpatient cases recorded with meningococcal infection[1] as principal diagnosis, Trent Regional Health Authority, 1979-85.

Trent RHA—Region of treatment

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Numbers	11	8	6	8	14	4	6

[1] ICD 9th Revision 036·0

[2] These data are taken from the Hospital in-patient inquiry, a 10 per cent. sample of NHS non-psychiatric in-patient records. The last data year for this study was 1985.

Mental Health

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information his Department collects on the movement of people after discharge from mental illness hospitals;

(2) what information is collected by his Department about people who have been discharged from mental illness hospitals.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the mental health history of the boarders in each local authority area in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1 April 1987, annual figures are collected about the intended destination of patients on completion of a duration of stay within National Health Service hospitals and units in a district health authority in England. The destinations recorded are:

1. Usual place of residence, other than those institutions noted below (including patients with no fixed abode);
2. Temporary place of residence, when usually resident elsewhere (eg hotels, residential educational institutions);
3. Penal establishment, court or police station;
4. Special hospitals;
5. National Health Service hospital outside district—general ward/younger physically disabled;
6. National Health Service hospital outside district—maternity/neonates ward;
7. National Health Service hospital outside district—mentally ill/handicapped ward;
8. Local authority residential accommodation (including foster care);
9. Deaths;

10. Other, including non-National Health Service hospital or nursing home.

The annual figures are not linked to individual patients and will include data on the same patient when admitted more than once during the year.

Certain statistics are collected about those for whom residential provision is made in the community. Those mentally ill people whose accommodation costs are met in whole or in part by local authority social services departments are counted at 31 March each year by sex, broad age band, and by whether they are in local authority homes, registered care homes or other accommodation. These statistics do not distinguish those who have at any time been resident patients in mental illness hospitals.

In March 1987 and March 1988, all local authority staffed homes and registered care homes catering for mentally ill people were asked to provide details of individual residents admitted during the previous year, including whether their most recent previous accommodation had been in a hospital or other NHS establishment.

The adequacy of current statistics about mentally ill people will be reviewed during the coming year as part of the Department's information systems strategy.

Statistics about local authority and other provision in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychosis were discharged from mental illness hospitals in each of the last three years; and how many of them were taken into local authority residential care in the same year.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows the number of discharges, excluding deaths and transfers, with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia from National Health Service mental illness hospitals and units in England for the latest three years for which information is available. The figures are for discharges, and not individual patients, since the same patient may be discharged more than once during the year.

Discharges[1] from mental illness hospitals and units, with a diagnosis of schizophrenia[2], England 1984-86

Year	*Numbers*
1984	23,879
1985	24,091
1986	23,975

[1] Excludes deaths and transfers to other hospitals.
[2] 9th Revision, International Classification of Diseases, 295.0-295.9.

Information is not collected by diagnosis on the numbers of people entering into care, or taking up accommodation, provided by the local authorities.

Mr. Goodlad To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people discharged from hospital following a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychosis and subsequently taken by the police under section to hospital have been refused admission in each health region in each of the last three years.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not centrally available.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department collects about admission under section and refusals of admissions under section to mental illness hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: From 1987 information has been collected centrally about the number of patients detained, within each district health authority, under each of the following sections of the Mental Health Act, 1983: section 2, 3, 4, 35, 36, 37/41, 37, 37(4), 38, 44, 46, 47/49, 47, 48/49, 48, 135 and 136. This information is available correlated to the mental category and sex of patient. Comparable information is available for earlier years and is contained in the Department's statistical note 1/88, a copy of which is in the Library. No information is centrally available on the refusal of hospitals to admit patients under sections of the Act.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychosis having been proved vulnerable boarders subsequently became voluntary boarders in each of the last two years in each health region.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential places in the community are currently available for those discharged from mental hospitals in each health region; what is the current rate of occupancy; and what are the projected figures for the next two years.

Mr. Freeman: Information on residential places specifically for people discharged from mental hospitals is not available. The estimated numbers of places in local authority, voluntary and private homes and hostels for mentally ill people in each health region in England, in the latest year for which figures are available, are given in the table. Neither occupancy rates nor projected figures for subsequent years are available centrally.

Numbers of places in local authority, voluntary and private homes in health regions in England—Places available at 31 March 1987

Health region	*Number*
Northern	482
Yorkshire	778
Trent	821
East Anglian	382
North West Thames	770
North East Thames	678
South East Thames	1,160
South West Thames	627
Wessex	473
Oxford	394
South Western	495
West Midlands	982
Mersey	464
North Western	662

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mental illness beds there were in each health region in each of the last five years; what was the rate of occupancy; and what is the planned number of beds in each health region in the current year.

Mr. Freeman: The table shows the number of staffed beds in mental illness hospitals and units, and their

occupancy rate, for 1982-1986. Since 1987-88, the first year of Korner data, information has been collected on "daily available beds", and is available in the booklet "Summary of KHO3 pt 2 Wards open overnight". A copy has been placed in the Library. The figures for occupied bed days for 1987-88 are not yet available and so a rate of occupancy cannot be calculated. The information about planned number of beds for 1988-89 is still being processed.

Region	1982		1983		1984		1985		1986	
	Beds	Percentage occupied	Beds	Percentage occupied	Beds	Percentage occupied	Beds	Percentage occupied	Beds	Percentage occupied
Northern	5,879	87	5,739	88	5,652	87	5,606	88	5,375	87
Yorkshire	7,001	83	6,561	84	6,455	81	6,070	82	5,660	84
Trent	7,263	88	7,104	86	6,910	86	6,679	86	6,520	84
East Anglian	2,940	83	3,039	81	2,855	78	2,756	79	2,655	81
North West Thames	7,389	87	7,193	86	6,657	88	6,433	88	5,968	89
North East Thames	6,681	86	6,556	87	6,147	90	5,887	90	5,771	89
South East Thames	6,581	81	6,268	83	6,103	82	5,774	83	5,417	81
South West Thames	6,645	89	6,425	90	6,270	89	6,061	89	5,528	91
Wessex	4,034	86	4,005	85	3,850	84	3,626	85	3,411	84
Oxford	2,349	80	2,316	82	2,244	85	2,290	83	2,195	82
South Western	5,283	84	5,058	83	4,586	85	4,454	84	4,226	79
West Midlands	7,962	83	7,664	84	7,352	83	6,964	84	6,764	81
Mersey	6,201	85	5,913	85	5,596	85	5,421	86	5,062	88
North Western	6,781	85	6,734	84	6,594	85	6,359	85	6,199	84
Special H.A.	508	69	457	78	459	81	457	81	464	69
England	83,500	85	81,032	85	77,730	85	74,837	85	71,215	77

Ambulance Calls (Kidsgrove)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will direct extra resources to be made available to the North Staffordshire district health authority to enable the response to ambulance calls from Kidsgrove to meet the Occon standard.

Mr. Freeman: The allocation of resources to the Staffordshire ambulance service is the responsibility of the West Midlands regional health authority which has this year increased its allocation to the service by £403,000 to £6,229,000. I understand that the Staffordshire ambulance service has commissioned a full review of its services to identify areas for improvement.

Kreutzfeldt-Jakob Dementia

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he now has any plans to introduce reporting procedures in respect of Kreutzfeldt-Jakob dementia.

Mr. Freeman: The chief medical officer is discussing with the Medical Research Council and the medical profession the most effective way of monitoring the incidence of Kreutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

Mental Health Act 1983

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health since the introduction of the Mental Health Act 1983, how many people have been removed from the United Kingdom under section 86; and if he has any plans to review the operation of this section of the Act.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

Two patients detained under the Act have been removed under this provision. There are no plans to review its operation.

SCOTLAND

Highland Health Board (Meeting)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland who attended the meeting between his Department and the chairman and general manager of Highland health board; what was the purpose of that meeting; and if he will place a copy of any minutes taken of the meeting in the Library.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: An informal meeting between the chairman and general manager of Highland health board and myself was held on 24 February to discuss matters of common interest. An official of the Scottish Home and Health Department was in attendance. No formal record of the meeting was made.

Ambulance Drivers (Overtime Ban)

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has received any recent representations from the trades union movement about the overtime ban by Edinburgh's ambulance drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No representations have been received from the trades union movement. The unofficial overtime ban ended on 27 March 1989 following a ballot of the membership.

Animal Diseases Research Association

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received any recent representations from the Animal Diseases Research Association about a reduction in research funding at its Edinburgh base; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The president of the association wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend on 28 February drawing attention to the alleged effects on work at the Moredun Research Institute of reductions in Government funding of near-market research.

The position is that a programme of Government-funded research for 1989-90 amounting to £2.558 million has been agreed with the institute's director, based on his recommendations on scientific priorities taking account of the Government's policy to phase out public support of near-market R and D. Additional resources will be directed towards molecular biological and immunological work, which offers the best opportunities for faster progress in animal disease control and prevention. Other work of lower scientific priority will be terminated or reduced. The allocation of recurrent expenditure for 1989-90 compares with the allocation of £2.596 million in 1988-89. In addition, the institute received £0.166 million from the DAFS increased flexibility scheme, and will be eligible to enter further bids in 1989-90.

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many community psychiatric nurses there have been in Scotland in each of the last three years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Arrangements have been made to collect this information for the first time this year. Data will relate to 31 March 1989 and should be available by early summer.

Schizophrenia

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the figures for research into mental disorders funded by the Scottish Home and Health Department in 1988-89 and 1989-90; and, of these amounts, how much are for projects specifically related to schizophrenia.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Outturn figures for the financial year 1988-89 are not yet available. Estimated expenditure is £105,615, of which £25,245 is for projects related to schizophrenia. Estimated expenditure in the financial year 1989-90 is £106,911 and £51,121 respectively.

Mental Health

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what information he has about the mental health history of homeless people in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what information he has about the mental health history of the homeless people in Scotland in each local authority area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about the mental health history of homeless people in Scotland is not collected. It is the policy of my right hon. and learned Friend that people should not be discharged from mental illness hospitals unless proper support facilities are available for them in the community.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information is collected by his Department about people who have been discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information is collected under the following headings:

Occupational condition on discharge (fitness for employment etc.)
Disposal on discharge (eg to home, hostel etc.)
Arrangements for after-care.

Mr. Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many mental illness beds there were in Scotland in each of the last five years; what was the rate of occupancy; and what is the planned number for the current year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information available is as follows:

Average available staffed beds and percentage occupancy for mental illness[1]

Year	*Average available staffed beds*	*Occupancy per cent.*
1984	13,054	85·2
1985	12,551	83·5
1986	12,191	83·2
1987	11,683	83·9
1988	10,155	82·6

[1] Excluding the specialties psychogeriatrics, child psychiatry, adolescent psychiatry.

Forward information for the current year is not available centrally.

New Towns Document (SDA Response)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why the Scottish Development Agency asked for its response to the consultation document "The Scottish New Towns—Maintaining the Momentum" to be treated in confidence.

Mr. Lang: Many communications between the agency and Ministers must of necessity be in confidence. After consultation with the agency, however, I am pleased to make the agency's views available on the same open basis as the other responses to the consultation document.

Rating Reform

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to introduce imprisonment as a penalty for non-payment of the poll tax.

Mr. Lang: No. The existing procedures which apply in Scotland are adequate to ensure collection of the community charges.

Rating Reform

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department had any hand in providing information to the *Evening Times* for its article published on 10 April, a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mr. Lang: No. The Scottish Office was not approached in connection with the article.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what directions he has issued to poll tax registrars on when to choose freezing of bank accounts as a method of enforcing either fines for non-registration or for non-payment of the poll tax.

Mr. Lang: Individual levying authorities are responsible for deciding when to take steps to recover civil penalties due for offences relating to community charges registration and arrears of community charges, and the means by which they do so. My right hon. and learned Friend has issued no instructions on these matters.

Health Boards (Membership)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideraion he gives to district representation in the appointment of members of a health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Members are not appointed to represent particular areas or interest, but the Secretary of State tries to ensure a suitable range of experience, expertise and background in the membership of any board. In doing this he takes the area of residence into account as one relevant factor.

Animal Pests and Diseases

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the annual loss to the British forestry industry from damage from animal pests and diseases, respectively, and also the annual costs in *(a)* preventive measures and *(b)* remedial measures.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is not possible to provide an accurate assessment of the financial loss from damage from animal pests and diseases as much of this is of a long-term nature. Records of expenditure on the protection of Forestry Commission woodlands are available, but no information is held on the expenditure in privately owned woodlands.

Health Boards (Membership)

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those members of health boards whose appointment terminates on 31 March and those whose appointment arises on that date giving for each the nominating body.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 March 1989]:* The information requested is as follows.

Health Board	*Nominating body (where appropriate)*
ARGYLL AND CLYDE	
Appointment ended	
Mrs. E. M. Cockburn	Russell Fairgrieve Esq.
Dr. R. Erskine	British Medical Association
J. H. Gillougley	Paisley Chamber of Commerce
Rev. J. Young	Renfrew Local Health Council
Appointed	
N. M. Faccenda	Scottish Conservative Party
AYRSHIRE AND ARRAN	
Appointment ended	
Mrs. A. M. Campbell	Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped
T. Dickie JP	Health Board
Mrs. M. W. Gallie	Mr. John Corrie
Dr. J. Morrow	British Medical Association
Mrs. A. B. Wilson	
Appointed	
Mrs. A. Bates	
J. D. Sharp	Confederation of British Industry
BORDERS	
Appointment ended	
Dr. W. B. Aitken	British Medical Association
P. S. Elliot	Scottish Trade Union Congress
R. W. Jack	Roxburgh District Council
A. C. Purves	Confederation of British Industry; British Medical Association
Appointed	
Dr. D. W. Cameron	British Medical Association
J. P. Metcalfe	Mr. A. C. Purves
W. Thyne	
DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY	
Appointment ended	
W. D. Beck OBE	Co-op Union Ltd.
Mrs. M. D. Dick-Smith	Dumfries and Galloway Regional Council
Mrs. A. R. Murdoch	Stewartry District Council
G. Willacy JP	Annandale and Eskdale District Council
Appointed	
Mrs. M. J. S. Cambell, the Countess of Dalkeith	Health Board
Mrs. V. Jardine-Paterson	Sir Hector Munro MP
FIFE	
Appointment ended	
J. S. Edmiston JP	Health Board
H. C. Forwell	Scottish Association of Master Bakers; Kirkcaldy Chamber of Commerce
Dr. J. B. Gallacher	St. Andrews Ambulance Association; West Fife Local Health Council
J. Marshall	British Medical Association; Royal College of General Practitioners
Mrs. M. M. Pullar	Royal College of Midwives
G. Reid	Harry Ewing MP

Health Board	*Nominating body (where appropriate)*
Appointed	
Mrs. W. R. Addison	Royal College of Nursing
Dr. A. C. A. Alexander	Dr. J. B. Gallacher
K. W. Fraser	Scottish Division, Institute of Directors
J. Murray	Health Board
FORTH VALLEY	
Appointment ended	
J. Cross	British Medical Association
A. B. Cruickshank	Clackmannan District Council
Prof. P. McEwen	University of Stirling
Mrs. W. J. A. MacFarlane	Scottish Trade Union Congress
A. D. McNeill	British Medical Association
Appointed	
G. M. Dougall	Health Board
P. A. Joynson	
Dr. J. D. Stewart	British Medical Association
Dr. H. B. Tavadia	Royal College of Pathologists; British Medical Association; Forth Valley Area Committee for Hospital Medical Services
GRAMPIAN	
Appointment ended	
P. Cook	Grampian Regional Council
Captain C. A. Farquharson	Gordon Local Health Council
Dr. J. G. Henderson	British Medical Association; Royal College of Psychiatrists; Grampian Area Committee for Hospital Medical Services
G. S. Peterkin JP	Scottish Trade Union Congress
Miss E. A. Sheldon MBE	Aberdeen Association for Mental Health; Society for the Mentally Handicapped; Muscular Dystrophy Society; Robert Gordons Institute of Technology
Mrs. V. A. Stevenson	Area Dental Committee; British Dental Association
Appointed:	
A. Broomfield	Health Board
N. Thornton-Kemsley CBE	
GREATER GLASGOW	
Appointment ended	
J. Jackson	Scottish Trade Union Congress
Prof. A. C. Kennedy	Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons; University of Glasgow
Rev. J. T. Lang	Church of Scotland
Dr. J. Mackay OBE	British Medical Association; Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons; British Dental Association; Royal College of Surgeons
L. M. Turpie	
C. Williams	British Medical Association; British Association of Social Workers
Appointed	
Rev. R. D. M. Campbell	
Dr. K. W. Davidson CBE	British Medical Association
C. MacKay	Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons
N. M. Naftalin	Health Board
HIGHLAND	
Appointment ended	
R. J. B. Bryson MBE	Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine; Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
Miss M. T. Hadden	Royal College of Midwives; Royal College of Nursing; Scottish Health Visitors; Association of Nurse Administrators
The Rt. Hon. Lord Macdonald	Skye and Lochalsh District Council
A. I. MacDonald	Health Board; Caithness District Council
Dr. W. D. Murray	Royal College of Physicians; Royal College of Surgeons; Hospital Medical Staff Association.
Appointed	
J. Forbes JP	
J. G. Ligertwood	Health Board
Mrs. S. G. H. Stone	Ross and Cromarty District Council
Miss I. Urquhart	Health Board
LANARKSHIRE	
Appointment ended	
Mrs D. C. McGirr	Royal College of Physicians; Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons
G. McIntosh	Confederation of British Industry
Dr A. M. Matthewson	British Medical Association
Appointed	
Dr W. Criggie	Health Board
I. L. Livingstone	Health Board

Health Board	Nominating body (where appropriate)
LOTHIAN	
Appointment ended	
Mrs. P. Bell	Conservative and Unionist Party
A. T. Clark CBE	Edinburgh District Council
Mrs. W. E. Donaldson	Lothian Regional Council; British Medical Association
W. B. Herald	Scottish Trade Union Congress
Dr. A. R. Milne	Health Board; Royal College of General Practitioners
Professor J. Williamson CBE	Edinburgh University
J. F. Wilson	Bank of Scotland
Appointed	
Mrs. H. G. Birrell	West Lothian Local Health Council
Mrs. S. J. Cunningham	Health Board
J. W. Stephenson	Lothian Region Conservative Group
ORKNEY	
Appointment ended	
B. M. Clark	Health Board
F. J. Groundwater	Scottish Trade Union Congress; British Medical Association
Mrs. J. Marwick	Orkney Local Health Council; Health Board; Orkney Islands Council
M. E. Porteous	Health Board
Appointed	
Captain M. Gunn	Confederation of British Industry
D. L. Kemp	Health Board
SHETLAND	
Appointment ended	
R. Leask	Confederation of Health Service Employees
W. A. Smith	Shetland Islands Council
G. A. Walterson	
Mrs. M. Williamson	Health Board
Appointed	
L. G. Groat	Shetland Islands Council
Mrs. A. I. Manson	Shetland Islands Council
Mrs. E. M. W. Poplar	Royal College of Midwives
TAYSIDE	
Appointment ended	
E. W. Cameron OBE JP	
J. Campbell-Smith	Perth and Kinross District Council
J. W. Duncan OBE JP	Co-op Union Ltd; Dundee District Council
E. C. Lowson MBE	Association of Scottish Chamber of Commerce
Prof. D. G. McDevitt	University of Dundee
I. W. Stevenson	Tayside Regional Council
Appointed	
D. W. M. Davidson JP	Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Mrs. S. H. Fallon	
The Most Rev. L. E. Luscombe	
D. J. T. McKenzie	Bill Walker MP
WESTERN ISLES	
Appointment ended	
J. MacIntyre	Western Isles Islands Council
Appointed	
A. W. Hay	Confederation of British Industry
Rev. J. A. Macdonald	Health Board
Dr. J. W. Robertson	Health Board

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Reform

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many severely mentally impaired adults he estimates will qualify to be exempt from the poll tax *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* in England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. We estimate that around 55,000 adults in England will qualify for exemption from the community charge on grounds of severe mental impairment. Figures are not available on a local basis.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the poll tax bill for each person in Nottingham; when this estimate was made; and when he expects to update it.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. I have made no estimates of future community charge levels. Illustrative figures were placed in the Library on 23 June 1988 showing community charges based on 1988-89 local authority budgets. Figures based on the 1989-90 rate support grant settlement were placed in the Library on 1 March. Illustrative 1989-90 figures based on expenditure returns will be provided in due course.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had since 1 April with poll tax levying authorities.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. Both Ministers and officials at this Department have frequent discussions with charging authorities. For example, since 1 April I have visited Wolverhampton and Dudley district councils and the London borough of Islington.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those European Economic Community member countries that have a community charge tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list information available to him on any countries which finance their local government from a poll tax, also expressing this as a percentage of world nations.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Members to annex K of the Green Paper "Paying for Local Government" (Cm.9714) which comments on international comparisons, and to the updated version of figure K3, which was published in the Official Report on 24 June 1988 at column *744*.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of single pensioners will be adversely affected by the introduction of the community charge; and what percentage of pensioners will be adversely affected by the community charge *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* in England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: Tables showing the impact of the community charge on pensioners in England were placed in the Library on 28 February 1988.

These figures based on an analysis of family expenditure survey data show that 75 per cent. of single pensioners, and 83 per cent. of single pensioner households, will pay less when the community charge is fully in place. Overall, 69 per cent. of pensioner households are expected to pay less.

I have no separate estimates for Nottingham.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total number of staff now working in local authority units specifically to register people for poll tax *(a)* in Nottingham and *(b)* in England and Wales; and what is the total wage bill for each category.

Mr. Gummer: The Government have no plans to introduce a poll tax. As far as the community charge is concerned, the information sought by the hon. Member is not available centrally. A summary of the available information on community charge implementation, including staffing levels, was placed in the Library on 10 April.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide an estimate of the amount of additional paper which will be required to provide for forms connected with the collection of the community charge, as compared with the old rating system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* No reliable estimates are available of the quantities of paper required to service the collection of domestic rates or of community charges. Since there will be twice the number of chargepayers as ratepayers, it would not be surprising if the volume increased.

I should imagine that the volume would be very much higher if we were to replace rates with the complexity of a local income tax, and higher still if that were combined with capital value rating, which I understand to be the Opposition's proposal for rates reform.

Babbington Pit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to preserve the former Babbington pit headstocks, Nottingham, in their present form on the current or a nearby site.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have asked our statutory advisers in English Heritage to assess whether there is a case for listing the headstocks as a building of special architectural or historic interest. I will write to the hon. Member when I have received their advice.

Olympic Games

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he was consulted by the President of the European Economic Community Commission before the announcement on 4 April by the president of his proposals that the United Kingdom team at the Olympic Games in 1992 should bear European Economic Community insignia and substitute an European Economic Community tune in place of the United Kingdom national anthem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The President of the Commission of the European Communities did not consult my Department about his announcement on 4 April about the 1992 Olympic Games. His proposals are for the British Olympic Association to consider. I understand that it is opposed to them.

Loughborough and Angell Town Estates

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is willing favourably to consider estate action schemes for the Angell Town and Loughborough estates in Lambeth.

Mr. Trippier: Lambeth's application under the estate action initiative in support of the first phase of improvement works to the Angell Town estate was received too late to be considered for resources this year. Applications for future phases will be treated on their merits. No application has been made in respect of the Loughborough estate.

Leasehold Contracts

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce legislation to ensure that leasehold contracts include full details of the leaseholder's commitment to insurance and maintenance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: No. These are matters for negotiation between the individual freeholder and leaseholder when a contract is drawn up or assigned. The Landlord and Tenant Acts 1985 and 1987 give significant rights to residential leaseholders in relation to both insurance and maintenance arrangements.

Drought (Contingency Plans)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department received reports from the water authorities concerning levels of winter rainfall; whether he expects the shortage to continue into the summer as a drought; and whether his Department has made contingency plans for a drought this summer.

Mr. Howard: We have been receiving regular reports from the water industry on regional rainfall and the state of water resources. Heavier than average rainfall over the last two months has greatly improved the situation; areas of potential shortage of water supply this summer are now relatively small and confined to parts of the south east. Responsibility for taking action in the event of drought rests with the water undertakers.

Council Housing (Allocation)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has on the proportion of *(a)* councils and *(b)* housing associations which publish their criteria for allocation of property; and whether any guidance has been issued to them on this point;

(2) what information he has on the proportion of *(a)* councils and *(b)* housing associations which have clear allocation policies according to need; and whether he has issued any guidance to them on this point.

Mr. Trippier: The information is not held centrally, but section 106 of the Housing Act 1985 requires local housing authorities and housing associations to publish their allocation rules. There has been no recent guidance to councils on this subject, but the tenants' guarantee, issued in January this year by the Housing Corporation, provides advice to registered housing associations on policies and procedures for allocation of their accommodation.

Strategic Planning (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements for consultation he has made in respect of his draft strategic planning guidance for London with *(a)* the general public, *(b)* London borough councils, *(c)* voluntary and community groups, *(d)* the business community and *(e)* other public and private bodies.

Mr. Chope: Copies of the draft guidance were sent to London Members, the London borough councils and some 180 organisations with an interest in London wide planning matters. The Department has publicised the consultation and to date has sent more than 350 copies of the draft guidance to members of the public, voluntary and community groups, businesses and others on request. A list of those commenting on the guidance will be placed in the House of Commons Library when consultation is completed.

Local Authority Housing (Capital Programme)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates have been made by his Department for the availability of resources for local authorities' housing capital programmes including non-prescribed capital receipts under both the current and the proposed capital finance regime proposed by the Local Government and Housing Bill 1989 in the years 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90, tabulated by non-metropolitan authorities, metropolitan authorities, inner London boroughs and outer London boroughs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table shows housing capital allocations for the years requested. It also shows the prescribed proportion of housing capital receipts and the amount, for each class of authority, by which cash-backed housing capital receipts in aggregate exceed the prescribed proportion of housing capital receips for 1987-88. Information on the availability of capital receipts by class of authority for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is not available.

The capital finance regime proposed in the Local Government and Housing Bill will apply to 1990-91 and subsequent financial years. Provision for housing capital expenditure in 1990-91 and 1991-92 was made in table 9.1 of the "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1989-90 to 1991-92 Chapters 9 and 10" (Cm. 609).

£ million

	Housing capital allocations[1]	*Prescribed proportion of housing capital receipts*	*Excess of cash backed housing receipts over prescribed proportion of housing receipts*
1987-88			
Shire districts	592	1,400	3,130
Metropolitan districts	377	300	270
Inner London boroughs	264	230	170
Outer London boroughs	146	320	580
1988-89			
Shire districts	500	n/a	n/a
Metropolitan districts	350	n/a	n/a
Inner London boroughs	265	n/a	n/a
Outer London boroughs	149	n/a	n/a
1989-90			
Shire districts	361	n/a	n/a
Metropolitan districts	249	n/a	n/a
Inner London boroughs	184	n/a	n/a
Outer London boroughs	106	n/a	n/a

[1]Provisional. For 1989-90 £208 million housing allocations have not yet been issued.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent the utilisation of non-prescribed capital receipts currently used by local authorities to fund part of their housing capital programme will be taken into account when assessing the level of Exchequer subsidy to housing revenue accounts for 1990-91 and in subsequent years.

Mr. Trippier: An allowance will be made in the calculation of housing revenue account subsidy for local authorities' revenue expenditure on maintenance. We believe that, under the present system, some authorities also use some of their capital receipts on what would normally count as items of revenue spending, and we shall be consulting the local authority associations on whether to reflect this in the subsidy calculation under the new system, and if so, to what extent.

LRB (Portraits)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply of 7 April, *Official Report*, columns *299-300*, he will give details of the portraits transferred from the London residuary body to the City of London.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The entire collection of portraits of London county council and Greater London council chairmen, and portraits of prominent members of those councils and of the Metropolitan Board of Works are the subject of the transfer.

Middlesex Guildhall Collection

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what criteria Harrow was chosen as the potential recipient of items from the Middlesex Guildhall collection currently in the possession of the London residuary body; which other London boroughs showed an interest; and if other boroughs were notified of the possible availability of the collection.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The London borough of Harrow was chosen because of the strength of its connection with the former Middlesex county council. No other borough was made aware of the availability of the Middlesex Guildhall collection for transfer, or showed an interest in acquiring it.

Lieu of Tax

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has accepted any land in lieu of tax in the last financial year.

Mr. Ridley: An offer of 18·91 acres at Oxey Mead, Yarnton, Oxfordshire was accepted in lieu of capital transfer tax. The amount of tax satisfied was £15,640. The land, part of a site of special scientific interest, has been allocated to the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust.

Parent Registers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the availability to community charge registration officers of the parent registers presently being compiled by local education authorities.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 12 April 1989]:* There is no requirement on local education authorities to compile parent registers. Registers containing the names of everyone known to be a parent of a registered pupil are required to be kept by schools, and access to them by officers of local education authorities is limited by regulations. Regulations on the community charge require local authorities to supply information about individuals to community charges registration officers only where it is within their possession or control. That information must be limited to names, addresses, and periods of residence.

Housing Stock

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has as to the average percentage of the housing stock of *(a)* councils, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private landlords vacant for more than three months at the last recorded date.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* The available information is provided by local authorities in their housing investment programme return (HIP 1). It is recorded in the "Housing Needs Appraisal: HIP 1 for 1988, Grossed for England", a copy of which is in the Library.

The return shows the number of local authority dwellings which had been empty for more than six months at 1 April but it does not provide any further breakdown of those empty for six months or less; nor does it show the length of vacancy for dwellings in other sectors.

Planning Guidance (London)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policies and proposals is his planning guidance for London are designed to meet the special problems and needs of (i) women and (ii) ethnic communities.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Ethnicity and gender are not relevant to land use planning.

House of Commons (Health and Safety)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for how many more weeks the stairway leading to the Official Reporters' gallery will be in breach of health and safety regulations, were they to apply; and if he will now replace the two out-of-order light bulbs.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 April 1989]:* Redecoration work on the Lady Members' staircase was restricted to weekends in order to maintain normal access. This inevitably prolonged the work, but it has now been completed and the area cleared. The light bulbs have been checked and are now in full working order.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 150**

SESSION 1988–89

4th April–14th April 1989

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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